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The Parable of the Watchful Servants

Luke 12: 35-48

The parable of the watchful servants DIG: What is the relationship between the watchfulness of this passage and the worry of Luke 12:22-34? What are the major concerns of these passages? Why does Peter ask the question in verse 41? Why does Yeshua answer as He does? Why does Christ say that they should be ready in verses 39-40? Who is the thief? What should be the attitude and actions of the faithful and wise manager in verses 42-43? What could tempt the manager to do wrong in verse 45? How does the Lord Himself summarize this passage in verse 48? How would the apostles have interpreted it?

REFLECT: About what dangers is Jesus warning you in these verses? Which danger is most likely to be a problem for you? What has God entrusted to you as His manager? If you knew that in 30 day's time the Lord was returning, what would you do to get things ready for inspection?

In this section **Messiah** told two parables (**verses 35-40** and **42-48**) to **His** inner circle of **apostles**, which were joined by a question from **Peter (verse 41)**. The second parable expands and explains the first. Although there is a sense in which these parables are quite applicable with respect to death, **Luke's** main point involves the Second Coming. This is clear from the use of the well-known image of **the thief** coming in the middle of the night. On the day before **His** death, **Yeshua** reemphasized the issue of watchfulness to **the Twelve** (**to see link click [Jv](#) - The Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Servants**).

The one main point to the parable of the watchful servants is that we need to be in a constant state of watchfulness and readiness for the Lord's return.

Instruction in Watchfulness: The Lord now gave **His** apostles an exhortation to watchfulness. **He** likened them to **servants** attending **their master**. **They** were to be ready to serve at any time. Thus **Yeshua** encouraged **them** to be dressed and to **keep** their **lamps burning**. **Be dressed ready for service**, literally *stand, your waist having been belted*. This image of a man who has tucked his long robe up under his belt in order to run is found frequently in the Bible. The use of the perfect participle, *having your waist belted*, portrays

someone who, instead of waiting until the last moment, is always prepared to act. **And keep your lamps burning (Luke 12:35).**

To impress this on **them**, **He** used the imagery of **a wedding feast**. The time of **the wedding feast** was not determined. When it would begin, no one knew. So **the master's** return time would be undetermined. The picture then, was of **servants waiting for their master** (Greek: *kyrios*) **to return from a wedding feast**. This **wedding feast** is not **the wedding feast of the Lamb** (see my commentary on **Revelation Fg - Blessed Are Those who are Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb**), because here **the master** returns to **his servants after the feast**.



When **he** returned **he** would expect **them** to be ready to minister to **him**. **So that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him**. If those **servants** were indifferent to **their** responsibilities, **they** would put out **their** lamps and go to bed. But **it will be good**, literally *blessed*, **for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes**. Truly I tell you, literally *amen*, **he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table**, referring to the **wedding feast of the Lamb** above, **and will come and wait on them (Luke 12:36-37)**. On the night **He** was betrayed, **Yeshua** washed the feet of **His** talmidim (see **Kh - Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet**). Because this is a parable, the details cannot be pressed. So here **Luke** uses symbolic language to say that those who are found faithful when **Jesus** returns will be honored.

The night guards in the Temple in Jerusalem were placed in twenty-four stations about the gates and courts. Of those, twenty-one were occupied by Levites alone; the other innermost three jointly by priests and Levites (the watch at some of the gates seems at one time to have been hereditary to certain families). Each guard consisted of ten men; so that in all two

hundred and forty Levites and thirty priests were on duty every night. The Temple guards were relieved more frequently by day, but not during the night. Hence, when **Yeshua** said: **Whether he comes in the second watch, or even the third, and finds them awake, he will reward those who are ready (Luke 12:38 NASB)**, **He** was specifically referring to **the second** and **third watches** as those of deepest sleep.¹⁰⁴¹

Christ then gave a second illustration of watchfulness. **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**, literally *dug through*. This suggests a mud brick Palestinian house. **The thief's coming** was a common image in the early Church for the Second Coming (**First 5:2-4; Second Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3 and 16:15**). Then **the Lord** applied **His** teaching: **You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Luke 12:39-40)**. This teaching was based on the fact that the Kingdom offered Isra'el had been rejected. Thus, it had to be postponed until a future time. **Jesus' servants** would be found watching, waiting, and prepared in view that **the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5)** would **return** again.¹⁰⁴²

Instruction in Faithfulness: **Yeshua** did not answer **Peter's** question directly. Instead these verses indicate that **He** was talking primarily about pharisaic Judaism of **His** day. The religious leaders were supposed to be managing the nation for **God** until **He** brought in the messianic Kingdom. **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? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk (Luke 12:42-45).**

However, they failed at their task. They were not looking expectantly toward the Kingdom. **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.** The degree of punishment will be determined by the privileges assigned to each person and the knowledge that has been revealed to him or her. In this parable the one who knew **the master's** will and was faithless because of the postponement of **the master's** return **will be cut to pieces**, literally *cut in two*, **and assigned a place with the unbelievers**. In **Jeremiah 34:18** this was the punishment for those who had broken covenant with **ADONAI** by mistreating their Hebrew slaves. **The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows (Luke 12:46-47)**. Since this was the

most severe penalty, **Christ** must not have been speaking about believers who were **not ready**. **He** is referring to the nation's leaders who will be present at the Great White Throne Judgment (see my commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**).¹⁰⁴³

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. Privilege brings responsibility and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Lk 12:48). The degree of light or knowledge one has, determines the measure of responsibility and, thus, the degree of reward or punishment.

In anticipation of **their master's** return from **a wedding feast**, **the servants** had dressed in proper attire, prepared food, cleaned the house, lit the lamps so that **he** could easily find **his** way home, and stationed **themselves** so that **they** could immediately respond to **his** needs. It was very late and **they** were tired, but none of **them** fell asleep or shirked **their** duties. Finally, **the master** knocked! Eager to care for **him**, **they** immediately **opened the door** and welcomed **him** in. And, for being prepared for **his** return **he** honored **them**.

How blessed those **servants** would feel! **Their master** had treated **them** with love and compassion, enabling **them** to love **him** in return. This parable reflects our lives as **servants** of **the great Master, Yeshua Messiah**. **He** has called each of us to serve **Him** in preparation for that great day when **we will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the clouds (First Thessalonians 4:13-18)**.

As **servants**, will we indulge ourselves in our **Master's** absence, or will we stand alert, ready to do **His** bidding? **Jesus** is eager to reward those who have labored in **His** absence and are awake and ready when **He** returns (see my commentary of **Revelation Cc -For We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**). **The Shield of our Salvation** is a loving redeemer and protector unlike any earthly **master** we will ever know. **King** though **He** is, **Yeshua** performed the ultimate act of service: **He** laid down **His** life on the cross so that we could be united with **Him** forever.

Our **Master's** return will be a glorious day for those who believe in **Him** and know **Him** as their **Lord** and **Savior**. On that day, **He** will acknowledge our faith and any good works on **His** behalf. **He** will embrace **His** faithful **servants**, saying, "Come, refresh your souls, partake in **My wedding feast**, and share in **My** joy. Sit down and I will wash the dirt of earthly trials, suffering, and hardship from your feet, anoint you with costly oil, and clothe

you in **My** pure white garments of righteousness.”

Lord, help me to serve **You** faithfully so that on that last Day, I may receive the greatest of all rewards . . . the fullness of joy in **Your** presence.¹⁰⁴⁴