

Luke 12:35-53 // When I'm Gone

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0:00] Verses 35 to 53, and that is on page 1045 in your church. Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning, like servants 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.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly, I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will make them recline at the table, and will come and wait on them.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or towards daybreak. 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.

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Peter asked, Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?

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.

[1:22] 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.

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.

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. 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. I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.

But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed. Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

[2:39] From now on, there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two, and two against three. 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.

Well, good morning, St. Silas. If we've not met, I'm Martin, lead pastor here. Thanks, Karen, for reading that for us. Jesus says some very striking things in this portion of Luke's gospel.

So it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at Luke chapter 12. It's on page 1045 of the church Bibles. And on the notice sheets, just on the back side, you can see an outline that will help you follow where we're going as we look at this together.

Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves now in your presence. May your word be our rule.

May your spirit be our guide. And may your glory be our supreme concern. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

[3 : 59] Just over a week ago, a group of boys in the beavers, the Cub Scout beavers, came to look around our church. They were getting a faith badge. And a couple of guys did a great job showing them around.

So they're six to seven years old. One of them said, his question was, if God is real, why can't we see him? It's a great question.

And there's lots of true answers we could give to that question. We could talk about how God is spirit and talk with someone about, are there other things that we can think of that are real, that we know are real but that we can't see?

But we could also point to Jesus and say, well, if we'd been in Nazareth 2,000 years ago, you could have seen God. Jesus got in a boat with his friends.

There was a storm. Jesus spoke. The wind and the waves died down. Only God can do that. If we want to see God, look at Jesus. But of course, someone could come back saying, but he's not here now, is he?

[5 : 00] I can't see him. And on a typical day in our lives here in Glasgow, maybe we think, Jesus just seems such a long time ago. He's profoundly not here in my life.

And we have lots of concerns and priorities and urgencies in our lives. And maybe we start thinking to ourselves, Jesus is out of sight and out of mind.

It looks today, looking around us, like you can have nothing to do with Jesus and do just fine. Maybe do really well. Is that something you ever think about?

Is that something you ever struggle with? That Jesus has been gone a long time and the world just seems to be going on as it's always done? Luke would have been aware of that as he wrote Luke's gospel in the next generation after Jesus, reflecting on having carefully investigated with the eyewitnesses.

And Jesus was aware that we'd go through this too. And so he wants us to understand our times and respond rightly to his absence. And our first point is this, the master's return will be delayed, so stay alert.

[6 : 14] Jesus says, look at it like this. Picture his kingdom like a household where servants are employed while the master is away and he's coming back.

So verse 35, be dressed, ready for service. Keep your lamps burning like servants 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.

So Jesus is really clear here that we should expect delay before he returns. And he emphasizes it in verse 38. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak.

So this is some wedding party, isn't it, that the master is away on. The ceilid goes on into the early hours. Maybe there's a champagne breakfast the next morning. Maybe there's a long journey home as well.

And for the servants, biding their time at home, you can imagine that they might start with an estimation of when the master would come back and they get things ready and they're ready for what he might want as he returns to serve him.

[7 : 26] And they're dressed well and ready to go. Lamps burning. And there's no sign of him. And it would be tempting to go to bed, to think, he's not coming, is he?

I'll just turn myself in. Or it might be tempting to think, well, I'll wait for him to arrive and then I'll quickly get dressed again and maybe that will be fine.

And Jesus says, stay ready. Stay watchful. Let your life be marked by you being waiting for Jesus' return.

A life that would be marked by prayer. Prayer being a mark that we have faith in Jesus. We're trusting that he's coming back. We're praying for his return. A life marked by serving him now because we know that when he comes back, we'll have to do that and we're preparing for that.

We're ready to go. We're not sleepy. But the day of the Lord will come. It's a delayed return. It's also an unexpected return.

[8 : 30] Have a look at verse 39. Jesus says, but understand this. So he wants us to get this. 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.

You also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. I got a leaflet through the door which said that a window cleaner was working in our area and he'd be in our area and it said what day and time he was going to drop round.

I've had leaflets from roofers saying if you've got problems with your roof, we work locally. If you contact us, we'll come at a time that's convenient for you to give you a quote.

I've never had that from a burglar. I've never had a leaflet saying, this is when we're coming, just so you know. Successful burglars don't operate like that.

They come when you don't expect or they don't last long. And so it is, Jesus says, with his return. Again, we can't wait around for someone to make some predictions so that we think, oh no, it's really going to happen now.

[9 : 37] I can get myself sorted and then get round to it. My wife, Kathy, got to know a couple just living out near Loch Lomond where their job is to manage a house on an estate.

They don't own the estate and the perk of the job is they get to live in this really nice house that they don't own to look after the estate in this beautiful setting. And the owner lives abroad.

He very rarely shows up to his house. So most of the time, they can live as though they've got it to themselves. But when he turns up, he doesn't give them notice and he expects the house to be ready for him.

If you were to ask then, so does that mean you've got to live every day as though he might arrive tomorrow? They might say, no, we have to live every day as though he might arrive today.

And so it is for us Christians as we live in Jesus' world knowing he's coming back and he'll come back when we don't expect it.

[10 : 46] We have to be ready now and we have to stay ready. So as we look at Jesus' words here, let me ask, are you ready personally? It could be today.

Do you think it'll be today? If you don't, then we remember Jesus said, it will be on a day we don't expect. Have you come to Jesus?

Have you accepted his gift of rest from God, peace with God? We're not to think, well, the Christian life, I can see other people are into it, but I can get around to that later.

You know, I've got other things I need to get in order first. There's a relationship I'm trying to sort out or my job or I'm just in a season of busyness. I'll put it off.

It could be today. And when he comes and knocks, it will be too late to get ready, which is a great thing for us to know, isn't it? If we're used to kind of winging it in life. If you're someone who, you know, turns up late for things, but it's kind of normally fine.

[11:51] You know, you just find your way in. Jesus says, it won't be like that when he comes back. Ready or not, he's coming. And so let's make sure that we've already settled our accounts with God through Jesus, that we're people who are praying, come Lord Jesus.

We're living with a sense that his coming, though it may be delayed still a long time, we live as though it's imminent, his coming, so that we're ready. Like Lord Shaftesbury, we've thought about before here.

I've mentioned him several times in sermons. He was a great figure in public life in Britain and he was asked how he'd had such an impact on the world and he said, I do not think in the last 40 years I've lived one conscious hour that has not been shaped by the Lord's return.

And then we see that this delayed, unexpected return of Jesus is going to be so good for those who are ready. In verse 37, he does something astonishing. Have a look. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.

Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve. He will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. This is absolutely extraordinary.

[13:05] Jesus uses the same language here that he's called his servants to be ready to serve him and he now talks about how he wants to serve them.

So in the picture of this household, you picture his servants dressed smartly, ready for the master to come back. The dining room is ship-shape. The food's ready in the kitchen in case he wants something to eat when he returns.

And then stunningly, when he walks in, he says, now you sit down, I insist. Because you were willing to serve me, it is my pleasure now to serve you.

And he comes and he waits on them around the table and it probably feels so wrong. But it's so wonderful that he's a master like this and he says he'll do that for us, what he has asked us to do for him.

Isn't that a wonderful picture that when we see Jesus in his extraordinary majesty and his glory, that his delight will be to have you recline at his table and to serve you and to rest there.

[14:10] That's what he rejoices in doing. It shows us something about the character of Jesus that I think we can sometimes not quite get right or not get. In Philippians chapter 2 it talks about the journey Jesus went on of great humility in Philippians chapter 2.

It's a very famous passage. It talks about how Jesus was in very nature God but he didn't consider that something to be used for his own advantage and he made himself nothing taking on human nature and being found in the likeness of man he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross.

And then it says in Philippians 2 therefore God exalted him to the highest place and has given him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

Now there would be a way of hearing that about Jesus and to think oh right so maybe Jesus was humble in his first coming coming into the world serving others so that in the new creation he can sit back and say now it's my time come on I've earned it from you serve me honour me because look look what I did I had my turn well that's not what it is is it what we're seeing here in Luke chapter 12 is that the character of Jesus is one of other person centred love forever he is unchanging in that that is the character we will see of him the character that drove him to the cross for us is how he will always be the new creation will be a world of other person centred love and he will be the exemplary model of that as he steps down from his throne delighted to serve us and we will follow his example because he will have made us to be like him as we should always have been so when Jesus talks about sometimes often unembarrassedly he talks to us about do this and you'll get your reward in heaven there is something in realising

I think that something of that reward will be more of him and more of getting to serve with him and being able to think oh great I get to serve with him what a joy what a privilege to keep serving others for their good and how good it will be to be at his table so stay alert he says be ready don't be sleepy that's our first point and then Peter interjects in verse 40 with this question verse 40 he says Lord are you telling this parable to us or to everyone and Jesus characteristically answers the question with another question he says who then is the faithful and wise manager it could be that behind Peter's question is that Peter's thinking well come on Jesus we are we are going to be ready we're in your inner circle so is this parable is this one for the crowd and Jesus builds on the parable to say well yes this parable is for everyone the servants in the household are all of Jesus' followers this is for everyone but if you're someone who's been given a particular responsibility and authority among Jesus' people if he's entrusted you with that much more do you need to take heed of the parable so that's our second point the master's return will be decisive so work diligently we learn about the manager servants in verse 42

[17:58] Jesus says 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 I take it that picture of giving out the food to the other servants is this picture of the work of making making and growing disciples with the word of God so in John chapter 21 the last chapter of John's gospel Jesus again speaks with Peter with Simon Peter and the risen Jesus three times says to him do you love me and when Peter says yes Lord you know that I love you Jesus says feed my sheep feed my sheep feed my sheep so it is taking God's word and using it to nourish other Christians the flock that is this work of that's being described here this responsibility in the household so who does that today by extension beyond the apostles we might think of ordained ministers who have that responsibility but we should think beyond that to the situations where any of us has opportunity to serve others among God's people with God's word nourishing them those of you involved here in children's ministry youth ministry small group leadership

Bible study leadership are opportunities with friends to open the Bible with them the big idea here is that on Jesus return he will be deeply concerned at how we've done in the task of growing disciples where we have a responsibility to do that how are we doing with that and then we get this very sobering warning in that warning for those to whom it applies reassurance for the other servants but it's of a calamity because for some their lack of care for others demonstrates that they were never true followers of Jesus at all so look at verse 45 suppose the servant says to himself my master is taking a long time in coming and then he then begins to beat the other servants both men and women and to eat and drink and get drunk the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he's not aware of he will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers so this is not a real Christian this person and yet they've got themselves into a position of responsibility over Jesus' house over the master's house of other servants and they're using it abusively and when we look around today at the visible church if we see in church life in the visible church people who are just in it for themselves for selfish gain for power for influence for money and they're causing harm to others

Jesus is anticipating here as he told this story that there will be people like that we might think of the institutional church wherever we see people who might be dressed in robes and vestments performing rituals walking the corridors of power but there's no real spiritual life there's no listening to God's word there's no faithful feeding of the flock from the Bible or we might think of the prosperity gospel teachers the word and faith movement people who promise health and wealth if only they give to support the ministry of that person and the person flies around in a private jet goes to places where people are poor and gives them this kind of false hope and it leaves people feeling disillusioned with the whole thing thinking I want nothing to do with church it's just people who are in it for themselves well there's warning here from Jesus but there's also reassurance for Jesus' faithful servants he is just he is deeply concerned about how servant managers treat his servants and for any of us who've experienced abusive leadership in church it's reassuring to know Jesus sees that he's very concerned about that he adds in verses 47 and 48 that his judgment of people will be proportionate the more someone knows of his will the more they will be held to account so there's calamity for the unbeliever who is a false leader but if we just track back up to verse 43 we learn that the master's return will also be a really good day for everyone who was just sought to be faithful and has worked diligently for him and his church so look at verse 43 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 so this is this disproportionate extravagant reward for the faithful servant if we were to picture the Sunday school leader who diligently prepares week by week for a small group of children not knowing whether or not those families will bring them on any given

Sunday and prays for them during the during the week and some weeks it's only two or three in the group and to be reassured the master smiles to know that ministry is being done faithfully and he says good for you when I come back it will be good for you or picture the ordinary pastor plugging away in a small town somewhere in Scotland and not many people move in and out and there's not much change year on year and week by week he works hard to prepare his sermons and thinks is it really worth it for this small group of aging people and in the neighborhood people don't like them and they stop them going into the school because they don't like what they believe and it's hard to stay disciplined working long hours being faithful but he plods on and when Jesus returns he says well done good and faithful servant I've got just the job for you

I want you to be in charge of all my possessions come and work with me in the new creation so the master's return is a decisive day where false servants are uncovered and exposed and there's calamity but faithful servants are given wonderful reward and Jesus wants you and me to make our choices today in life shaped by this promise that he will return if we struggle to picture that because it will be at this kind of catastrophic event the thing to do in the Christian life is we look back in history to have confidence about what's coming we look back to the resurrection that's where God has demonstrated that Jesus will return as he raised him from dead after he died never to die again but people around us are not going to choose to live in light of the master's return and Jesus wants us not to be held back by that and by the opposition they might bring to us and the choices we make so that's our third point the master's work will cause division so stay with him let's start with the astonishing question that Jesus asks in verse 51 he says do you think I came to bring peace on earth and reading

[26:00] Luke's gospel up to now how would we answer that question would we not say yes Jesus 100% you are the prince of peace Jesus that's what you've come for we heard the angels in Luke chapter 2 they announced when you were born you've come for peace on earth Jesus says no I tell you but division what does he mean well the angels as Jesus birth was announced promised on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests in other words those who receive grace from God through Jesus they find peace with God and it brings relationship peace as well relationships are restored dividing lines across humanity are broken down by the message of Jesus as we're all one in him but he forewarns us here Jesus that in many of our relationships and in many of our families it won't be like that verse 52 from now on there will be five in one family divided against each other three against two and two against three they'll be divided father against son and son against father mother against daughter daughter against mother and so on now it's not that we as Christians are to look for this and bring this about imagine a guy comes away to university from a non-Christian home and he becomes a

Christian and he goes back home to his parents and they might be understandably concerned about this change in their son has he been manipulated what's influenced him what's caused this decision it would be understandable but what they should see in their son is not that he turns against them but rather they should see that he is now looking to honour them and love them in ways that are different and new he respects them in a new way he listens to them there's change in him and hopefully they'd also see there are all sorts of other changes in his life and they're able to look and go these changes are for the better even in a way that might win them over to look at Jesus so the Christian is not trying to create division but Jesus is saying from the other side people may choose to oppose you very fiercely for having decided to follow Jesus they hated him and they may hate you for it think of a woman that we knew in Lancashire from a

Muslim family who became a Christian through a friend at school and the day that her family discovered a bible in her room she phoned a friend who'd given the number to her on the landline she knew when she hung up the phone it would make a beep downstairs and so she hung up the phone she ran out of the house and she knew that she would probably never get to speak to her father or her brothers again such was the opposition in her family to responding rightly to Jesus and if you're someone here who fears any of that or anything like that from people you love for responding to Jesus or if you've experienced that as some in our church family have done Jesus warns us about it so that we won't let it hold us back from staying with him he brings division and then we get to this remarkable portion of today's passage it's that

Jesus tells us about a dilemma in his own heart and mind and it starts in verse 49 with what he wishes he could do in verse 49 he wants to bring fire verse 49 I have come to bring fire on the earth and how I wish it were already kindled what does he mean well fire is often used as a bible picture for the judgment of God John the Baptist earlier in Luke uses the image of fire for God's judgment in the way that you could cleanse the threshing floor after you've been threshing wheat of all the chaff using fire because it just consumes the chaff and leaves the precious wheat behind or when people go mining for precious metals if you go mining for gold what you get is ore which is this mix and you use fire because it burns away the slag and leaves the precious stone behind it purifies and when we look around at our world we see a world that is riddled with horrific evil and injustice in fact it's one of the things people sometimes say as an objection against

God isn't it they say well if your God is really there why is there so much evil in the world these terrible things happen surely if God is good and he's there he would do something to stop it well what an awful thought it would be to read of the things that are going on in our world in news stories to hear of children being kidnapped from schools in Nigeria young girls being trafficked from eastern Europe to be used in the sex industry and in pornography the Islamic state filming Christians being beheaded on beaches for following Jesus sending the film around the world how awful it would be if there will be no justice for our world what an awful thought if one was to believe there will never be a day of reckoning a day when these things are put right and people are held to account and Jesus is saying here he sees all of that he sees what this world is really like he knows what's in people's hearts he knows what's going on and he has the power to put it right and he wishes he could he wished it 2,000 years ago that the fire was already kindled he wants to get on with it he wants to consume the evil and purify the world forever and it will be this great demonstration of his righteousness his goodness in his world so if someone says to us well why doesn't

[32 : 36] God just fix the world one answer you could give is you know he can't wait to do that or rather he almost can't wait so what could it be that would matter so much to Jesus that he would wait why hasn't he done it yet well he tells us about this how torn he is on the inside that he wouldn't yet bring the justice that he's desperate to bring and why he still hasn't brought it today and the reason is in verse 50 but I have a baptism to undergo and what constraint I'm under until it's completed what constrains him is his greater desire to be a saviour he knows that we would all be consumed by the fire of his judgment so he's not come to bring the fire but to endure the fire as he goes to the cross and the fire will be poured out on him and he will exhaust it out of love for his people in

August 1949 in Montana there was a terrible wildfire and when the fire was sweeping through and closing in there was a crew of firefighters there trying to tackle it and they realised that it was coming so fast towards them that fleeing would do no good they would just get consumed and a member of the crew Wag Dodge did something drastic he deliberately lit a fire in front of them and he burnt up the vegetation of the ground in front of them and then he called his crew mates and he ordered them all to lie down in the ashes and the main blaze swept through by them and they were held safe because when the fire comes the safest place to stand is where the ground has already been burnt and for the Christian we find that burnt ground at the cross and we cling to it knowing Jesus has exhausted

God's holy wrath against sin for us so that we don't need to fear the fire that he's bringing and as Jesus shares with us that inner dilemma that he feels we can pause to reflect how much Jesus must love us his mercy and love for us must be so extraordinary that he seeing the distress in our world seeing our world crying out for justice he would constrain himself out of patience that we would have life that's what our master is like and he's reassuring us today that he is coming back for us and he tells us what to do while we wait for him he says stay awake be watchful and be busy work diligently to build up my people let's pray together lord jesus we praise you for your character your righteous desire to judge and your wonderful divine mercy that you would stay your hand from the day of justice that we all need so that we would hear the message of the cross and lord jesus we feel that dilemma ourselves in our lives we long for more time for those we love around us to respond rightly to your mercy but we also yearn for you to bring justice to bring an end to the evil all around us so we pray come lord jesus and heavenly father by your spirit would you grant us the resolve the faith the courage to be watchfully alert for our master's return that when he comes and knocks he will find us trusting him serving him and supporting the feeding of your people through your living word we ask these things in jesus name amen