

The Wise Servant (Luke 12:35-48)

³⁵[Jesus said,] “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶like 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. 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. 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. 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. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” ⁴¹Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?” ⁴²The 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? ⁴³It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵But 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. ⁴⁶The 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. ⁴⁸But 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.”

1. In Jesus’ first parable (verses 35-40), whom does the master represent? Who are the servants of the master? What does the master’s return from the wedding banquet represent?

2. By virtue of faith in Christ, every Christian is a servant of Christ. Read the following passages. Whom are we to serve? Give examples of our service to each. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

3. The words “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching . . . ready” indicate that something of great seriousness will take place when Jesus returns. What is it? How does Jesus’ illustration of the homeowner and the thief punctuate the seriousness?

4. According to verse 37, there will be a role reversal in heaven; the master will serve his faithful servants ____ because, by their faithfulness, they have earned this reward. ____ to make up for everything they sacrificed while on earth. ____ only and entirely as another expression of his amazing grace. ____ because they have gone above and beyond the normal duty of Christians.

5. Peter's question prompted Jesus to say more about faithful service in his kingdom. Whom does the manager of verse 42 represent? What is the food that he distributes, and how does he do so "at the proper time"? How and why might a manager misuse his position?

6. Who is a wise servant of Christ? How can each of us become one?

7. If you knew that the master was returning in exactly one week, would your service look any different in the next seven days than it has in the past? Why or why not?

8. Explain verses 47 and 48.

9. How does Satan use materialism in his attempt to undermine the faithfulness and watchfulness of God's servants? How does he use today's schedules? How does he use our sinful natures?

Helps: (1) Jesus is the master. His servants are all Christians. The master's return represents the Lord's return on judgment day (or, to some extent, the moment of one's death). (2) Christians serve God by doing everything in life in such a way that God is glorified. They serve themselves by caring for their bodies and, above all, by caring for and feeding their souls with God's Word and Holy Communion. Christians also serve fellow Christians and other people in a number of ways: helping them with physical needs, praying with and for them, witnessing Christ, worshipping together, etc. (3) When the Lord returns, there will be an accounting of everyone's service. The fact that the time of Jesus' return is unknown adds to the seriousness. A wise homeowner is prepared at all times because he does not know when the thief will come. Likewise, the wise servant must be ready, watchful and faithful at all times. (4) The reward for faithful service is one of pure grace. (5) The manager represents leaders in the church (pastors, teachers) who have been entrusted with the spiritual care of others. In a sense, however, parents, grandparents, youth leaders, etc., are also managers, given the responsibility of distributing and applying properly the food of God's Word, both law or gospel. Anytime is the right time to share Jesus. A lack of faithfulness and vigilance may lead managers to abuse and exploit their position and authority for their own selfish and self-centered purposes. (6) A wise servant of Christ carries out his or her responsibilities in faithfulness and is watching and ready for the Lord's return at all times. This wisdom comes only through repentance and faith in Christ the Savior and grows as faith grows. (7) Jesus may return in the next moment! This should lead us to practice daily contrition and repentance. The promise of forgiveness in Christ compels and empowers us to thank our Savior with lives of ever more faithful service as we reach out to others who still do not know Jesus or his saving gospel. (8) Not all are punished alike. Those who have been given a greater knowledge of the Lord's will, who have received greater gifts from him and therefore greater responsibility, will be punished more severely for unfaithfulness and a lack of vigilance. (9) The lure of materialism, the busyness of our schedules, and the greed, laziness, and self-centeredness of our sinful natures can destroy faithful service to the Lord. Daily contrition and repentance is in order for every Christian.