

Luke 12:35-40

³⁵“Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning. ³⁶Be like people 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. ³⁷Blessed are those servants, whom the master will find watching when he comes. Amen I tell you: He will dress himself and have them recline at the table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸Even if he comes in the second or third watch, they will be blessed if he finds them alert. ³⁹But know this: If the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰You also be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you are not expecting him.”

Served

I.

He stood there, impeccably dressed, yet blending into the background. That was his job. He was to pay attention at all times, yet act as though he had heard nothing from the conversation between his employers and their guests.

If you watched TV series like *Downton Abbey*, you can picture the scene. The servants were totally unseen and unheard from until called upon to serve in whatever way. Then, the response was to be immediately given: “Yes, my lord.” “Yes, my lady.” Just do what you are told; no questions asked, no backtalk, no quibbling with the orders. Get on with your job.

At a moment’s notice the Lord or the Lady might come up with some grand scheme for a ball or a party. The job of the servants was to make it happen, no matter how difficult, no matter how little time they were given. Even when the Lord and Lady were gone, the servants had to be prepared to spring into action immediately upon their return, however unexpectedly it might be.

II.

“Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning. ³⁶Be like people 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, EHV).

Jesus paints a *Downton Abbey* style picture of believers waiting for his return at the Last Day. No matter how late the hour, no matter how unusual the circumstances, believers are to be there, ready and waiting. We are the servants of Jesus.

Jesus chose the wedding banquet as the situation while the servants waited very deliberately. As late as some of today’s wedding receptions might go, they are nothing compared to Jewish wedding banquets of Jesus’ time. Back then the banquet could go on for days. The servants had absolutely no idea whether it would be a short or long time before the master returned.

There were no electric lights that could be turned on by flipping a switch, so lamps had to be kept burning at all times. If the master came back with his bride in the middle of the night, the servants would not want to be responsible for having him return to a dark home. They would want to be ready to wait on their master, providing whatever service was needed for himself and his bride.

“Even if he comes in the second or third watch, they will be blessed if he finds them alert” (Luke 12:38, EHV). The second watch would be 9 p.m. to midnight. The third watch,

midnight to 3 a.m. A smart group of servants might set up a military-style system. There would always be a few who were on duty, tending to the lamps and keeping an eye on the driveway leading up to the house. If they spotted anything, they could quickly alert the rest so that everyone would have time to straighten their clothing and look sharp as the master entered the home.

III.

Do you know what “Boxing Day” is? I’m sure you remember me speaking of it in a sermon; after all, it was mentioned by me in January of this year.

Boxing Day is not the day that prizefighters enter the ring for a fight; it has nothing to do with the sport of boxing. Boxing Day has become a holiday in many countries that were previously part of the British Commonwealth. There are a couple of possibilities concerning the origins of the holiday.

Perhaps the most compelling is that of servants having the day off on the day after Christmas. Servants had been compelled to make sure all the holiday events went off smoothly for the Lord and Lady. They had been there through the every beck and call of the long hours of the Christmas celebrations. The day after Christmas was the opportunity for the staff to take the day off and go to celebrate with their own relatives.

The Lord and Lady would give a “box” to each member of the staff. Perhaps there would be some gifts for the family members of that staff member. There might be some of the leftovers from the meal. There might even be a little Christmas bonus for each member of the staff. In some little way the Lord and Lady would serve the servants with a little gift.

Imagine the shock of the staff if the Lord and Lady and their family would invite the staff to sit down at the family’s formal dining table. Imagine their further shock if the Lord and Lady and their family began serving the servants. Unthinkable! That simply does not happen, even on Boxing Day.

“Blessed are those servants, whom the master will find watching when he comes. Amen I tell you: He will dress himself and have them recline at the table, and he will come and serve them” (Luke 12:37, EHV). Jesus, the Master of the universe, does the unthinkable.

He actually already did the unthinkable by serving us while he walked this earth. As Jesus’ servants, we have failed him many times over. We have failed to be loving to others, as he taught us to be. We have failed to love and serve him above everything else, as God’s law requires. In fact, we have failed to live up to every single command God has made of us.

Jesus took every single one of those failures on himself. He carried them to the cross. From the cross Jesus cried out with a loud voice: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Mark 15:34, EHV). God’s requirement of punishment is hell. The most severe punishment of hell is separation from God. When God the Father abandoned him on the cross, Jesus suffered the hell we deserved for all our sins. He already served us perfectly with his innocent life, being forsaken by God, and his sacrificial death to take our place in death.

Because of the way Jesus already served us during his life on earth, we live as people who know where we are going. Heaven is our real home. “Amen I tell you: He will dress himself and have them recline at the table, and he will come and serve them” (Luke 12:37, EHV). Jesus is not talking about the service he rendered us with his death on the cross and his resurrection and his ascension into heaven. He is talking about heaven.

On the Last Day, a day far greater than any Boxing Day, he will seat us, his servants, in the banquet hall of heaven. He won’t call in another batch of servants; he won’t get a catering service to prepare something special for his trusted servants. While any large

gathering requires a large staff to wait on those who are seated, that's not the case for the heavenly banquet; Jesus himself will come and serve us. What a picture!

IV.

“But know this: If the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into” (Luke 12:39, EHV). After the beautiful picture of Jesus serving us, his servants, Jesus gives one final warning by switching to a new picture.

A homeowner who knows that a thief is coming dare not let down his guard, even if it is the middle of the night. Who knows which of the four watches of the night the thief will choose to smash a window or break down a door? It is important to be ready, no matter what the circumstances.

“You also be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you are not expecting him” (Luke 12:40, EHV). Be ready. Be ever vigilant.

So many of Jesus' parables spoke about those who put off spiritual things while they enjoyed the things of this world. Too many people who have heard of what Jesus has done do just that. Tomorrow is soon enough for them to get serious with their faith. In their youth they want to enjoy the things of this world; later they will turn back to Jesus.

“Be ready” is a present imperative. There is no putting off your readiness. Be ready now. Be ready tomorrow. Be ready 10 years from now or more. Be ready at all times. You don't know when the thief is going to attack you; you don't know when Satan will try to rob you of your faith; you don't know when God has determined that your time of grace will end.

Be ready always.

Unlike the staff at Downton Abbey or some other great manor, Jesus does not want you to simply blend into the background, hearing and saying nothing about what you have seen and heard. You are not just his servant, you are his *trusted* servant. Jesus wants you to share what you know of your Master. His service is not limited to some, but Jesus has already died for the whole world and all its sin. Jesus wants to serve everyone in heaven.

Today one church year draws to a close. Next Sunday a new church year begins with the season of Advent. We look forward to Jesus' second coming by preparing for our celebration of his first coming. Prepare by inviting others to the feast where Jesus is not just the host, but the one serving his guests. Amen.