

Got a Lot? Use It Well! • Luke 12:35-48

I grew up as the youngest of four sons. That always seemed to me to be a good place in the birth order because my parents were older, less idealistic and more tired. They let me get away with things they would never have let my older brothers do. Since my next older brother was five years my senior, by the time I was a teenager he had left home and my parents were psychologically ready for the empty nest. As a result, they went away on a number of trips and left me home alone. I liked that. In fact, the more they were gone the better I liked it.

Before leaving, my parents would give me a long list of instructions about washing the dishes, feeding the pets and keeping the house in order. What I actually did was use every dish in the house, leave the place a mess and neglect the pets. Then the day before I expected them home I would make a concerted effort to clean up everything and make it look as good as if I'd done it all along. I figured they would never know the difference.

One time my parents took a trip to Florida for a couple of weeks and I neglected things. If the health inspector had come, the house would have been condemned. One day my parents called to ask how everything was going. I said everything was just fine. I remember vividly the conversation. The telephone was mounted on the wall next to the refrigerator in our kitchen and my mother asked if I was feeding Peter every day. Peter was her pet parakeet with a huge vocabulary. He said things like, "Peter, Peter, Peter" and "Are you having a nice day?" My father was a pastor and the bird regularly announced, "Here comes the pastor." To top all this off, my mother is from England so Peter spoke with a British accent. When my mother asked if I was feeding Peter I immediately looked into his cage on top of the refrigerator. He was dead—upside down on the bottom of the cage. I knew I was in serious trouble.

I honestly don't remember how I answered my mother's question, but it was probably something less than the full truth. Maybe I hoped he was sleeping or sick. But, after the call was over my worst

fears were confirmed. Peter was dead. I thought about going to the pet shop and buying a replacement that looked just like Peter. But I knew that the chances of teaching him to talk in three days were not very good. I had to face it; they were coming home soon. I was in deep trouble, and there wasn't much I could do to get out of that trouble.

Needless to say, when they arrived home my parents were very unhappy. Angry might be a better word . . . or disappointed . . . or thinking about not feeding me for a couple of weeks. The good news is that they didn't disown me. I was still their son. But I have always wished I had done what I was supposed to do.

It was like the teaching of Jesus in Luke 12:35-48, although Jesus wasn't talking about parents and parakeets. He was talking about his second coming and how we should live between now and then. He used an example from his own time and place, an example of a wealthy landlord who went away on a trip and left his servants in charge of his estate.

There were two main points that Jesus wanted to teach us all. They were readiness and responsibility. God wants his followers to know we need to be accountable to him. Jesus said:

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 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."

In those days men wore long flowing robes. They may have been cool and comfortable in that climate and culture but they were a problem when working. They got dirty, they slowed men down and sometimes they caused them to trip.

So, it was common practice for a man to take the bottom of the robe and tuck it into his belt. This became the usual dress for work. Any time you saw a man with his robe tucked into his belt you knew he either was working, had just finished working or was about to work. So, when Jesus said, "*Be dressed ready for service*", everybody knew exactly

***If God calls us home
through unexpected death,
we should be ready to go.***

what he meant. Don't be lounging around. Don't fall asleep. Don't even get too comfortable. Keep your working uniform on.

Jesus also said, “. . . *keep your lamps burning.*” He was referring to the typical lamp in a Palestinian home that looked like a gravy boat or an Aladdin's lamp. They had lighted wicks that floated on top of the oil. They worked pretty well except the wicks required frequent trimming in order to stay lighted. They knew exactly what Jesus meant. When the master of the house comes back from the wedding banquet you better have your robes tucked in your belt and be ready to open the door and welcome him as soon as he knocks. These were his expectations.

When I was a young pastor in a Colorado church with a couple hundred people in a town of about 20,000 I was almost always on call during the night. Many times I would spend hours at the hospital with someone who was desperately and then slip away to go home for a few hours of sleep. I would regularly leave instructions with the charge nurse to call if they needed me. Then, before going to bed, I always laid out my clothes so that if the phone rang I could dress quickly and be on my way to the hospital across town in less than a minute. I got pretty good at it. I was always ready to go.

That's the way Jesus wants Christians to be—always ready to go. If Jesus were to return to earth today, we should be ready to go. If God calls us home through unexpected death, we should be ready to go. There should never be a need to ask for an extra hour, day, week or year.

What does this mean practically? Well, is there anyone you haven't forgiven? If there is someone against whom you are holding a grudge you are not ready to go. The Bible says we should never let the sun go down on our anger. The very longest we should hold on to anger against another person is until sunset . . . and that's stretching it.

Is there any sin you have not confessed? If there is, you are not ready to go.

Is there anything you really need to do before you die? I don't mean something like climbing Mount Everest or making another million dollars, but something like sharing Christ with someone who needs to hear or fulfilling a promise you made a long time ago.

Do you have assets you will leave behind but haven't gotten around to writing a will? If so, you

are not ready to go. There are many Christians who could do enormous good for the cause of Jesus Christ by leaving some or all of their money to a Christian organization or cause but they have never bothered to write a will and their money will go to the government or some distant relative who will squander and waste what could have brought others great blessings.

Most of all, is your relationship to God what it should be? If not, you're not ready to go. Don't be so foolish as to assume that there is plenty of time. Don't assume that you have years to get on right terms with God. There are millions of examples of people who thought they had decades to go and who died in minutes instead.

Jesus was very direct. Be ready. Everyone is on call. The issue is not whether God's knock will come today or in the next millennium. The issue is not whether Jesus Christ will come back today or in another 2000 years. The issue is that we should constantly be ready.

For those servants who are ready, Jesus has some good news in Luke 12:37-38:

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. 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.

We might not quickly catch the significance of Jesus' illustration but this was a real shocker to his first listeners. Jesus was talking about servants—slaves, actually—and saying that the Master who found his slaves ready would treat them like kings. He would dress himself like a servant, seat his slaves at the dining room table and serve them! What Jesus here proposed was not only something they had never seen or heard of, they never even imagined anything like it.

Now, this is a parable. The idea of a parable is not so much to take everything in the parable literally but to get the main point. Jesus' main point is that there are big surprising rewards for those who are constantly ready and who are not caught by surprise when the master comes. In today's terms, we may be assured that God will greatly bless and reward those who live their lives in constant personal readiness for God.

Should we, then, be motivated because we expect a reward? Should we be motivated by fear that we will be caught if we're not ready? No, we should always be ready because it is the right thing to do. To go back to Peter the parakeet, I should have fed and cared for the bird out of a desire to do what was right and good, not out of fear of my parents (although, I would have made my mother much happier, as well!).

The only way to be ready is to always be ready. It's like wearing seat belts. If seat belts are going to do you any good, you have to wear them all the time because you never know when you might get hit. Jesus didn't use seatbelts as an example; instead he referred to burglars breaking into houses. He said, "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." Obviously, if you knew when a thief would break in you would be ready. If you knew when your car would be in an accident, you would buckle up. But, we don't know, so we have to be ready all the time. Jesus said, "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Jesus' first point is readiness. His second point is responsibility. Together they demonstrate our accountability to God.

After Jesus told his parable, Peter (the apostle, not the parakeet) asked who Jesus was talking about. Was Jesus talking about everybody or just talking about his closest followers? Jesus didn't directly answer Peter's question. Instead, Jesus asked a question of his own in verse 42: "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?"

Let me tell you in advance where Jesus is going with this question. He is about to teach his followers that the greater your blessings the greater your responsibilities. Here is how Jesus answered his own question:

It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I

tell you the truth, 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 menservants and maidservants 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.

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. 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.

The problem with correctly understanding Jesus' teaching is that we are tempted to get hung up on the details of masters and slaves and beating people up. That's the way it was done back then. Actually, there are many places in our world today where slavery or something close to sla-

very is common. Beatings are common today. Jesus was not approving or endorsing such inhumane treatment of people. He was simply using an illustration everyone in the audience understood. So, don't get hung up on the details and miss the main point.

Jesus' illustration compares two servants. In one case the master goes away and leaves a good and responsible servant in charge of everything. When he comes back he sees the great job his servant did for him while he was away and puts that servant in charge of everything he owns. In the other case the servant is irresponsible. While the master was away the servant got drunk, beat up the other servants and generally mismanaged everything. He figured he could get away with it because his boss was gone for so long. But, the boss came back, held him accountable and punished him.

...we may be assured that God will greatly bless and reward those who live their lives in constant personal readiness for God.

Jesus summed it all up saying, “*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.*” Jesus taught that the more he entrusts to us the more he expects from us. If you are stronger, if you are smarter, if you are richer, if you are more knowledgeable God expects more of you.

This is based on the assumption that everything you have belongs to God and is on loan to you. You don’t own your own house. God owns it. The money you have isn’t yours; it’s God’s money. Those aren’t your children; they have been entrusted to you by God. Your business isn’t your business; it’s God’s business. Your health, your time, your education, everything belongs to God. You are the manager. God will come and check out what you did with what is his. He holds us all accountable. He expects us all to be responsible.

What if we lived in our houses as if we owned them? What if we managed our money as if it were ours and used it all for ourselves? What if we pretended it was our car, our children, our careers, all ours? Obviously, that would offend God.

One the other hand, what if we treated our homes, health, jobs, assets and time as if they belonged totally to God and managed them well for him. God would like that.

It’s not hard for God to check. It’s not hard for anyone to check. Look at the checkbook. Look at the business practices. Look at the weekly schedule. It is very obvious to see those who act like managers for God and those who pretend they own everything themselves.

I grew up less than a mile from the home of a very wealthy man whose name, if you are in the financial world, would be very familiar. By anyone’s definition, he lived in a mansion. His garage was filled with very expensive limousines, sports cars and vintage automobiles. The family hired a full-time chauffeur who lived on the family property and whose full-time job was to care for and drive the cars. He was employed by the family for decades. Apparently he did an excellent job. The few times I saw the limousines driving around town they were immaculate. But they were not his. He was a servant. He was entrusted with a responsibility. He was accountable. But when the owner died, he left all the cars to the chauffeur. He was responsible and he was rewarded.

That’s what Jesus calls us to do. Be responsible and be rewarded. The more you are entrusted with by God the more responsible you must be. “*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 invite you to make a mental list of God’s blessings to you. I’ll prime the pump. You have life when other people are dead. You have health when other people are sick. You live in America when other people live in very difficult places. You have money when other people are poor. You have education when other people are uneducated. You have a job when others are unemployed. You have friends and family when others are alone. You have the Bible when other people are ignorant. You have Jesus Christ when others are lost. You have a home when others are homeless. You have opportunities when others are limited. That’s just the beginning of the list. What else has God entrusted to you? Lots!

Jesus is delighted to let us have and use what is his. But he holds us accountable. He calls us to readiness and responsibility. “*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.*”

Thank you, our God, for your generosity. You have given us so many blessings. The catalog is very full. Thank you for all you have given us, but by your grace may we be ready, may we be responsible and may we be accountable to you so that you could come at a moment’s notice and find that we have been faithful to you in all you have entrusted to us. That’s the way we want it to be and we know that would please you deeply.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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