

Parable Of The Faithful And Evil Servants

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Forerunner, "Bible Study," November 2003

Since Christ's return comes at an unexpected hour, Jesus teaches His disciples to be ready at all times. In Luke 12:35-48, He tells two parables (verses 35-40 and 42-48) joined by a question from Peter as to whom Jesus was referring (verse 41). The second parable expands and explains the first. These illustrations are paralleled in Matthew 24:43-51.

The narrower sense of these parables is that of preparedness for the second coming of Jesus Christ. All who are members of the household of faith must be found serving God and one another with regard to things of the Kingdom of God. The wider sense of this parable refers to the time when God calls us. It is a call to prepare to meet our God. Both senses express the overall theme of this parable: "watchfulness."

1. What is so important about watching? Luke 12:35-38; 21:36; Matthew 24:45-46; I Peter 1:13.

Comment: "Watching" points directly to the necessity of being ready for Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. It also includes patiently waiting, as is seen in Matthew 25:1-13, where the virgins must wait for the bridegroom. If the master's return is late at night or very early in the morning, the alertness of the servants is even more commendable. Jesus teaches that His disciples should always be ready because He would come at a time when they would not be expecting Him. The parable pictures several servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet. They must remain constantly vigilant so that the master could enter the house immediately upon arriving at home. If they prove worthy by being watchful and ready, their master will care for them.

2. What mistakes does the unwise servant make? Luke 12:39-40; Matthew 24:42-44.

Comment: Jesus' comments about the thief point out that His disciples must be ready because the Son of Man will come unexpectedly (Matthew 25:13; Mark 13:33; Revelation 3:3). The story as a whole, not the individual characters in it, provide the comparison. The unwise servant makes two mistakes. First, he says, "I'll do whatever I want while my master is away," forgetting that the day of judgment must come. Human beings have a habit of having two different attitudes toward God. Sometimes, we remember that God is present, and at others, we may not think of Him at all. Second, he says, "I have plenty of time to put things right before the master comes." Nothing may be more harmful than to assume we have more time (I Thessalonians 5:3). Jesus says, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

3. Why is the faithful servant blessed? Luke 12:41-44; Matthew 24:45-47; 25:21.

Comment: Jesus says that exhortations to "watch" apply to everyone (Mark 13:35-37). In this case, the parable that follows shows that the apostles have a special responsibility. In it, the steward in charge of the servants is a servant himself, teaching the importance of faithfulness in doing the will of the master (I Corinthians 4:2). Not only does Jesus

teach the certainty of His return at an unexpected moment, but he also implies that the church—His disciples—would continue serving God for an unspecified time until His return. As He says, "Blessed is the servant whom His Lord will find so doing when He comes."

4. How did the evil servant neglect his responsibility? Luke 12:45-46; Matthew 24:48-49; 7:15-23; James 4:17.

Comment: The attitude of the evil servant is contrary to the command to be ready. His severe treatment of the other servants is similar to the description of false leaders who ravage the congregation (Acts 20:29-30). Similarly, the dramatic portrayal of the servant's punishment, "cut him in two," stresses the seriousness of his evasion of responsibility. The original statement in Aramaic was probably "he was cut off," which has two implications: to be executed or exiled for sin. With respect to the church, it means being disfellowshipped from associating with church members because of flagrant sin. Luke 12:42-46 emphasizes our responsibility for those placed under our care. On the other hand, verses 47-48 focus on our response to our Master's command.

5. Are we judged according to what we understand? Luke 12:47-48; Numbers 15:27-31.

Comment: The evil servants fail in their responsibility because they are not looking faithfully to Christ and hopefully toward the Kingdom. The penalty tells us that Jesus is speaking about Christians who are not ready either because they ignore their calling or because they neglect to produce fruit worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8). Faithless Christians will be judged more strictly than those who, though wicked, do not understand about the coming of the Son of Man. Professing Christians with knowledge of God's revelation will have to answer for their lack of response to God.

Their punishment seems severe until we realize that the servant who knew his master's will represents those who sin arrogantly or presumptuously (Psalm 19:12-13). Even though the servant who was ignorant of his master's will sins unwittingly, it was his business to know his master's will. In either case, each holds personal responsibility for his actions and therefore comes under judgment. All have some knowledge of God (Romans 1:20-23), and He judges according to the individual's level of responsibility.

The parable finishes with the warning that knowledge and privilege always bring responsibility. Sin is doubly sinful to the person who knows better. We who know better would like God to find us with our work completed upon His return, just as Jesus was able to say to His Father, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4-5). It would be wonderful for God to find us glorifying Him and at peace with our brethren when Christ comes.