

## Watch for Your Lord, part 2 (Luke 12:41-59)

Sunday school June 4, 2017

I want to call you attention to **READ Luke 12:35-40**. Last week we started studying this parable, which talks about the Lord's second coming. To boil it down to a single phrase, this parable says that we are 100% certain Jesus will return but 0% certain as to when, and there are some other scriptures that confirm that. We studied the parable itself last time, but we did not get to the interpretation of the parable that Jesus gives to His disciples, which is verses 41-48.

**Transition:** So that's where we'll start this time. **HAND OUT OUTLINES**. These outlines start with II. because they are a continuation of the ones I gave you last week.

**II. Explanation of the Parable** Just like the parable, the explanation is broken down into 2 pieces: the servants who have done well and will be blessed and the servants who have not done well and will be punished. The punished servants in turn are broken down into two subcategories. So let's start with...

**IIA. Blessed Servants (Doing the Lord's Will) READ v. 41-44** Twice Jesus is referred to as "Lord," once in verse 41 by Peter and again in verse 42 by the narrator. This confirms that the "lord" or landowner in the parable we studied last week does indeed represent Him. Verse 43 tells us that the servants who will be blessed are the ones that, when the Lord comes, will find them "so doing," that is doing what the landowner had told them to do. They are not doing some great work like inventing a new plow to make the farm more productive, but they are just doing what the landowner had told them to do. What's important is that the verb "doing" is present tense, so they were still actively doing the lord's will when He returned.

One of the things that bothers me is the number of people in my acquaintance over the past 10 years or so who have stopped serving the Lord. I know of churches (not this one) that are full of people like that. They still come to church every Sunday, but they are doing nothing for the Lord. To stop serving the Lord is one of worst things you can do. We should be "so doing." We should do what He has called us to do until either we can't physically do it anymore (which happens to all of us at some point) or He calls us to do something else. When He returns, He should find us doing (present tense) what He has called us to do.

**Transition:** Next category...

**IIB. Punished Servants (Wandering Heart) READ v. 45-47** The thing that characterizes these servants is at the beginning of verse 45: “if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming.” They do not say it out loud where others could hear it, but in their minds where decisions are made they have forgotten that the landowner is returning. Because of that, the servants start doing what is right in their own eyes rather what is right in the landowner’s eyes. In this metaphor, those things includes some actions we in our society would find certainly immoral and probably graphic and illegal (such as beating servants under his command), but such behavior was common in Roman times. The Romans had almost no restrictions on what masters could do to servants. They had no minimum wage laws, health and safety laws, or overtime laws like we do today. Because the servant has forgotten that the lord will return, he does whatever he wants to do and thinks he will get away with it. Jesus assures us he won’t because the lord will with 100% certainty come again. Verse 46 starts by saying, “The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him.” That day of coming is not chosen out of vengeance on this servant. The servant will not be looking for him on that day because the servant is never looking for him. He is not mindful that the lord will return.

Verse 46 also gives a graphic picture of the punishment that servant will endure: a person being cut in two. As I have mentioned a few times in the past, some people incorrectly view that image to mean that we can lose salvation if we don’t watch for him by living holy and godly lives now, as we talked about last time. No, scripture makes our eternal security as believers clear over and over. Rather, the last phrase in verse 46 says that the lord will “will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.” That is, that servant will have the same eternal rewards as unbelievers, namely none. The issue in this entire passage is not your salvation but your service and the rewards you will have at His second coming.

**Transition:** Last category....

**IIC. Punished Servants (Unaware) READ v. 48** This servant does same things as the one in the previous case, but this servant “knew not” the lord’s will. He doesn’t willfully forget that the lord will return; he does them unaware of what he should be doing. The reference I gave you is James 4:17, which says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Some people read a verse like that and think: maybe we should just live in ignorance and be unaware of everything so we’ll endure less punishment. No, because this servant is still punished, just with few stripes rather than many. The category you want to be in is the first one: the blessed servants who are watching for their Lord. Also, you have to remember that Jesus’ immediate audience did not have God’s completed word like we do. Therefore, they did not have teachings on the second coming like I Thessalonians 5, II Peter, and Revelation like we do. So unlike His original audience, none of us are really unaware, partly because we have God’s completed word.

**Transition:** The remainder of chapter 12 gives some additional comments Jesus makes about His second coming, but now His first coming also starts to come into play. The two comings start to interweave together, so you have to be a little more careful. That is...

**III. Division Caused by His Coming READ v. 49-53** These verses talk about the total separation that will take place between God's people (people who have trusted in Christ) and everyone else (people who have not trusted in Christ). Verses 52 and 53 borrow some language from Micah 7:6, and they make clear that this separation cuts through everything: class, race, even houses and families. All that matters in this separation is: do you trust Christ or not? Nothing else matters. I mentioned that Christ's two comings start to intermingle now, and to keep them straight you have to really pay attention to the verb tenses. Notice verse 49 says, "I am come." That's present tense, so it refers to His first coming. He confirms that with the last phrase in that verse "if it be already kindled?" The total separation has already started with His first coming. In verse 50, the tense changes. Jesus says, "how am I straightened (or pained) till it be accomplished." So this baptism, which is a reference to His suffering and death, is not accomplished yet, but it's near. For us, it is history. In verse 52, He says "For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided...." That's future tense. So the separation has already begun now, but it is not fully manifested yet. The reference I gave you is I Pet. 2:9, which calls us a "chosen generation" and a "peculiar people;" that's true right now even though it hasn't been manifested yet. I can't look at someone and tell at first glance whether they trust Christ or not. I can study their actions, but even then I can only make an educated guess.

Jesus talking about Himself as a divider seems odd in light of some other things that He said and were said about Him. In Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah is called the Prince of Peace, not the Prince of Division. In Luke 2:14, the angels announced at His birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." In Luke 10:5-6, Jesus sends the 70, and He tells them to first say, "Peace be to this house," to greet them with peace. So how does this division mesh with Him being the Prince of Peace? In Jesus' era, the only way to obtain peace was through victory. Peace through compromise (you get a little of what you want; I get a little of what I want) is a fairly modern idea. In Jesus' times and still somewhat today, the only way to get peace was by defeating all of your enemies. The Roman empire during Jesus' time was at peace; this time period is called the *pax romana*, or the Roman peace. They were at peace because about 20 years prior they had defeated anyone who was a serious threat to them. That's what Jesus is going to do: defeat all of His opponents. Jesus will not bring peace by making a deal with the world and the devil but by defeating them. That process of defeating them has already begun (especially with the cross), but it is not yet fully manifested. That's the division caused by His coming.

**Transition:** Last point...

**IV. Discerning the Present Time** In the last 6 verses, Jesus uses two metaphors to make two final points concerning this division that is to come. First,...

**IVA. Evidence of What is to Come READ v. 54-56** Jesus now turns back to the crowd, the more general audience. To understand this metaphor, you need a little geography lesson. West of Israel was the very large ocean-like Mediterranean Sea, which like any low-latitude ocean area has warm moist air. So when the wind blows from west, it blows that moist air into Israel. If you know a little physics, you know that when the warm moist air rises and meets the cooler air in higher elevations, the moisture condenses to form clouds, dew, and rain. Similarly, the area south of Israel is the Negev Desert. There is no moisture in the desert, so when the wind blows that air up into Israel from the south, it gets hot and dry. In fact, the temperature in Israel has been known to rise up to 30 degrees in 1 hour just because of the hot air being blown in. So in Israel you can tell what will happen to the weather just by determining which way the wind is blowing. The division He was speaking of in verses 49-53 had already begun (that is, the wind in this metaphor had started blowing), but the crowd en masse was not detecting it. For example, in Chapter 11, they asked Him for a sign after He had just cast out a devil and caused a dumb man to speak, which in itself was a pretty good sign. The crowd wasn't interpreting the events they were witnessing correctly.

This reminds us that the only way to interpret events correctly is in the light of God's word. Back in chapter 4, Jesus opened His ministry by preaching out of Isaiah 61. Repeatedly He referred to the Old Testament prophets and law during His ministry. He's trying to get them to see Him and His ministry through the lens of God's word, as it had been given at that time. If the crowd and Pharisees had been looking at these events through God's word, they would have recognized who He is. Some of them did, but most of them didn't. Most of them just wanted to benefit from His miracles or pick a fight with Him and find ways to accuse Him. Likewise, to interpret things that happen in our lives, we need to use God's word. As I've mentioned before, there are some faculty, even some religion faculty, down at AU who support gay marriage. They think they are doing God a service, showing God's love to gay people and protecting them from those evil, hateful conservatives who only want to banish them (which is really not what I want to do). But they are not doing God a service, and I know that by reading God's word. I wouldn't know that without His word.

**Transition:** The final metaphor describes the...

**IVB. Urgency to Act Now READ v. 57-59** This second metaphor invokes a Roman debtors court. You can tell that because of the "magistrate" they go to in verse 58 rather than Jewish rabbi, who would normally settle this type of dispute in a Jewish setting. The punishment meted out, the casting into prison, is a severe form of punishment for an unpaid debt. Usually the Roman court would make the debtor work it off as slave labor, but here the debtor was cast into prison. While he was in prison, the court would sell some of his assets, probably at fire sale prices, to pay off the debt. So under this punishment, not only does the debtor have to repay the debt, but it costs a lot to do it and he loses his freedom, which is why this was a very severe punishment. The severity comes up again in verse 59: the debtor has to pay "the very last mite." A mite is half a penny, so there is no debt forgiveness at this point: he pays every little bit. In hindsight, the debtor would have been far better off to repay the debt rather than to endure this punishment. To do that, he needed to act immediately before it was too late.

## Conclusion

This last metaphor reminds me of the song “The Old Account Was Settled.” “The old account was large, and growing every day, for I was always sinning, and never tried to pay. But when I looked ahead and saw such pain and woe (that’s the debtor prison in this metaphor), I said that I would settle, I settled long ago.” For lost people, the time to settle the sin debt by trusting in the payment Jesus made is now. For Christians, the time to live for God is now. Remember the 2 things we need to do from II Peter 3 to watch for Him: live holy (separated from sin) and godly (life of service to Him). The consequences of waiting too long to settle are severe. For lost people, the consequence is eternity in hell. For saved people, the consequences are loss of fellowship with Him and loss of eternal rewards. The time to do these things, to be watching for Him, is now.