

Serving Till He Come

Luke 12: 35-43

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As having been engaged in our readings with the various aspects of the coming of the Lord, one would desire to raise the question as to what effect these truths are to have upon us whilst we await His return. This section of Scripture lies very much on one's heart, and I want with the help of the Lord to pass on a very practical word as to our service in this world as having in view His coming again.

Some years ago, while quite young in the faith, I had the privilege of hearing an address on the verses preceding those we have read together, and the impressions gathered that evening remain with me still. The points made in that address may be of help to others as they were to oneself.

It was suggested that this was a dissertation on discipleship, seen under four headings. In the first section, Luke 12: 1-3, the thought stressed was "no covering," the key for this being found in Luke 12: 2, "For there is nothing *covered*, that shall not be revealed." The next section, Luke 12: 4-12, gives us the thought of no "cowardice" as seen in Luke 12: 4, "Be not *afraid* of them that kill the body." The third suggestion is in Luke 12: 13-21, and in this section we have the suggestion of no "covetousness"; the key for that being in Luke 12: 15, "Take heed, and *beware of covetousness*". The last section is in Luke 12: 22-34, and here we have the thought of no "care," "*Take no thought* for your life" (Luke 12: 22). These four features — no covering, no cowardice, no covetousness and no care — occupy the teaching to Luke 12: 34. From where we begin to read (Luke 12: 35) another word is suggested, which is no "*carelessness*." It is this we have in mind in the section we have read together.

We see in verse 35 that the thought of alertness is stressed by the Lord, "Loins . . . girded" has in view active service; "lights burning" suggests that we are to be living witnesses of our Lord. Two words were pressed upon us in our readings, "stand firm" and "hold fast." If we stand firm we will not give way, and if we hold fast we will not give anything up. Here are two similar words suggesting active service and living witness. If these things are true of us in practice then the next verse will also be true, "And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord." Brethren I ask myself as I ask you, are we like men who wait for their Lord? Do we appear like men who are waiting for the coming of their Lord? This is a most testing word for us all, what do we look like as we pass through this world?

The Lord Jesus uses the parable of a wedding, that is His coming is connected with joyfulness as far as we are concerned. It will be connected with sadness for those who do not know Him as Saviour, but to us it is a joyful expectation. Often one has heard it said that for the saints His coming is like a thief in the night. Far be the thought. What, has it to be said of the saints that His coming is unwanted; unlooked for, as a thief in the night? Indeed no, that aspect of His coming relates to the world, not to His saints. We are awaiting His coming, looking for it as we sing, "In hope we lift our wishful, longing eyes." Verse 35 suggests alertness so that at His first knock they are ready to receive Him. May this increasingly be the attitude of *our* hearts as the fruit of the consideration of this theme.

What a reward for watchfulness is seen in the following verse! In answer to our service for our Lord *here*, He says He will serve us *there*. We are to sit down with Him when He comes, active service down here will end at that time. May we take care not to sit down now; it is activity today but rest in that day, and all active service in this day will have its reward in that day. Let us not be careless about these things, taking care lest we are tempted to sit down before the time.

In the next verses we have references to the Lord's coming in the words, "second watch, or in the third watch," verse 38. As a point of interest we may look into what is said about these expressions in other parts of Scripture.

It appears that the night, like the day, is divided into four sections — the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour and the twelfth hour. This according to Jewish time is calculated from six in the evening until six in the morning, and so from six in the morning until six in the evening. While both the day and the night appear to be so divided, names are given to these four night divisions which could not be applied to the day. Hence we read of the first watch, second watch, third watch and fourth watch. Along with this Mark uses other four terms, "at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning" (Mark 13: 35). If we take careful note of the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25 we find that it does not say the bridegroom came at midnight, but "there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." This aroused them at midnight, but it does not say he came at midnight. It has long been taught that this parable refers to what took place one hundred and thirty years ago, when the hope of the coming of our Lord was revived in living power in the hearts and lives of many saints of God. Thus we are past midnight.

Moving on in thought to Matthew 14, when the Lord appeared as walking on the water, we are told it was the fourth watch. How often we have rightly heard that passage used in setting forth the assembly as identified with our Lord, in contrast to Israel as seen in the boat? Peter is seen as a pattern of this when he left the boat to join Christ on the water. As the Lord reached the boat Peter was with Him, an apt picture of the Lord bringing us with Himself when He comes for the relief of Israel. That will be in the fourth watch, the last watch of the night; His coming will thus end the night and usher in the day.

With these references in mind we look again at the record in Luke and now see that the second watch is coincidental with midnight, and that the third watch precedes the fourth. It is striking that these two only are mentioned here. It is clear that we are past the second watch, and at the third watch our Lord will come for His own. Matthew 25 refers to midnight, and in Matthew 14 to the fourth watch, because the appearing is in view in that gospel as having the establishment of the kingdom in mind. To use well-known words the heavenly company is in view in Luke, those whose names are written in heaven (Luke 10: 19). The Lord will come in the third watch to take us to heaven; He will publicly appear in the fourth watch for the salvation of Israel, and when that occurs we shall be with Him.

LUKE 12: 41-44

As Peter listened to the Lord's discourse recorded in the previous verses, his curiosity stirred him to ask, "Lord speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all"? (verse 41) That these instructions are for those who *profess* to be disciples is clear from the succeeding verses, for no true believer will ever have "his portion with the unbelievers." The Lord alone knows those who are true in heart; we judge by the conduct one of another, and these verses indicate the marks by which *true* servants are characterized. It is imperative that we who do belong to Him as servants to a Lord should pay heed to these warning words. How good to ask in language drawn from another testing occasion "Lord, is it I?"

Without definitely indicating to whom He was referring, the Lord answered Peter by asking *him* a question, but do we not plainly discern that the question involves everyone of us? "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?" (verse 42). We sometimes refer to such passages as abstract. The value

of these abstract statements is that we can all put ourselves into them, and this doubtless is what our Lord intended. The word "steward" here indicates a household servant in contrast to a labourer in the vineyard, and it would perhaps suggest our service to the saints in the assembly. Where does such service come into evidence? In the local gathering to which we belong. Are we giving that which we are capable of giving to help the interests of our Lord in the gatherings to which we belong?

Two things are said to mark such a servant — "faithful and wise." "Faithful" would indicate a sense of responsibility to the Lord, and "wise" would suggest the ability to know what and when to minister. We are all concerned in this, for all have *some* measure of ability, and how good it is when we use the ability which the Lord has given us to further His interests among His people. There is surely a call for faithfulness and for wisdom today.

A further word of encouragement is given to us in the next two verses. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath," (vv. 43-44). Faithful service today will be rewarded by the Lord in His administration of the world to come. This is seen in the parable of the pounds, "Well, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities," Luke 19: 17. As in that parable, so here, rule in the world-to-come is the reward offered.

Lastly, we see that this service is to go on until the coming of the Lord. We know that those who first heard these instructions have long since left this scene of labour, and will not be here "when He cometh." Yet the indication is that there will be some servants actively serving when the Lord comes. It may be our privilege to be here when that moment arrives, and if so how happy to be found "so doing" at the very moment when He comes to take us to be with Himself. When He comes for us all opportunities for service here will cease; in the light of this may we be preserved from carelessness as to these instructions, and may we seek grace to be actively serving Him until we see Him face to face.