

Coming Ahead *Buckle Up & Get Ready* Luke 12:29-48

Introduction: The date was January 17, 1994, and you remember where you were. Or to be more specific, you remember where you were at around 4:30 in the morning if you lived anywhere in or around Ventura County. This was the morning of the Northridge earthquake which caught thousands in this area by surprise and did monumental damage. The death toll was 57, with more than 8,700 injured. In addition, earthquake-caused property damage was estimated to be between \$13 and \$40 billion, making it one of the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history. If you lived here at the time you remember where you were, what you felt like, and the experience of being woken by the shaking of the earth.

I was still in high school up in the Bay Area during that quake, but can remember the exact moment and place when the Loma Prieta quake hit in 1989, right before Game 3 of the Bay Bridge World Series. On October 17, just after 5pm I was walking with my family across a baseball field after playing a game and watched the field turn to rolling waves and the light standards turn to swaying arms. 63 people died and almost 3800 were injured as freeways were turned to rubble and bridges into barricades.

If you live in California, you know about the immanency of earthquakes, but that does not mean we are always prepared. Maybe for the first few years we make sure we have shoes, water, and a flashlight under our bed so we don't have to find our way outside in an unprepared way, but the longer we go between major earthquakes, the more slack we become in our preparation. With less anticipation comes less readiness, and with less readiness there is a higher likelihood of destruction and needless injury.

In a similar way, we often live the same way when it comes to the imminent and sure return of Christ that will usher in a future kingdom that will be forever. The less we anticipate, the less we prepare. The less we prepare, the less ready we are for His return, and the more **fear, covetousness, and anxiety** we will face. Getting ready and staying ready is Jesus' plea here, and it means we must examine our heart, our alertness, and what we have been entrusted.

This is the first time in the narrative that Jesus spoke of His return a second time, and He was already getting His followers prepared for this reality. Here are the things that we know for sure:

- After His resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, an angel told the stunned disciples "why do you stand looking in heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven **will come** in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11).
- His second coming will be the culmination of redemptive history, will be judgment on the wicked, blessing for the righteous, and the final exaltation of the true King and Lord, Jesus Christ
- There will be a sign-less event where Jesus takes His church up to heaven, meeting them in the air, dining with them, and preparing them for a Kingdom to come (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-17)
- After this, there will be a Tribulation on this earth where unprecedented judgment will take place (Rev. 6-19)
- This will be followed by the gathering of faithful Jews, and an ushering in of a 1000 year reign on the earth (Rev. 20:1-4), followed by a final judgment, separating those who will be saved and those who will enter hell (Rev. 20:11-15)
- This will culminate in a refined earth (2 Pet 3:10-12) ushering in the eternal kingdom where God will reign with us and we will see Christ (Rev. 21-22)

Now, if we are honest, there are faithful, mature, and knowledgeable believers who may differ on some of these points. Some may not believe in a rapture, while others believe the tribulation and millenium are more symbolic rather than literal. While we may disagree, most who take the Bible seriously and literally will agree that Jesus will return, He will usher in the eternal state as described in Rev. 21-22, and that this world will be changed (there are many other wrong views of the Kingdom, but that is for another time)

For us, the concern is NOT as much do we believe Jesus is returning, but the question is: *are we indifferent to it?* Does it factor into our daily thinking, our planning, our life? Or are we so earthbound in our affections and thinking that the thought of Jesus returning like a distant earthquake: we know we should do something, but the longer we *don't* think about it, the less likely it seems. There are several reasons why this happens:

- **Ignorance** - We just don't know what to think about His return and haven't studied the realities
- **Distraction** - We have so much going on in the here and now that we can spend bandwidth on future things (see Col. 3:1-4)
- **Apathy** - The same thing that kills us in our pursuit of Christ or our fervor for our spouse - we are apathetic toward life, selfishly indulging in our own malaise not realizing our life is not our own
- **Clingons (or we love this world)** - We cling to this world, finding our hope, joy, and pleasure in the stuff here to the point that heaven, Jesus, and eternal life. Those things are ok, but they don't fill our heart with joyful hope, mostly because we don't struggle against sin, have become comfortable, and thus love this world.

This whole section is about getting and staying ready, and failure to do so could reveal that Christ is not our greatest treasure and salvation has not been realized in our life.

Getting Ready For Jesus' Return Involves:

Being Proactive and Practical with our treasure (29-34)

"And do not **seek** what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For **al the nations** of the world **seek** after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, **seek** his kingdom, and these things will be added.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. **Sell** your possessions, and give to the needy. **Provide** yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

- **Seeking what is Distinct & Primary**

On the back end of His discussion on anxiety, Jesus addressed not just our external needs, but what drives our heart, motives, and life. Three times in this section He uses the word "**seek**" referring to what we run after in our lives. Believers in not only Jesus but His provision of us should by nature **seek** in this world differently than the rest of the world. The Gentile world (those apart from Christ) seek hard after the things of this world - what they will eat and drink - because **1)** that is all they have to look forward to **2)** they have no assurances that ANYONE else is fending for them. Those who know Christ should **seek** differently in this world because GOD PROVIDES those things for us - the things that will sustain our life. We should not spend our passions on these.

Instead, we are to **seek** His Kingdom (and His righteousness - Matt. 6:33). Our passion should be taken up with what is sure in the future. Why is our pursuit of His kingdom so important? At the center of the kingdom is the KING, and we should pursue Him, seeking after Him. This future kingdom is sure, is ruled by Christ, and cannot be taken away. In the present, we ready ourselves for the Kingdom by announcing

the King to others and readying our lives with relentless pursuit of holiness. Our passion is not for the things of this world but for the KING of what is to come.

- **Treasuring what is Lasting**

Fear exists when we are uncertain about an outcome or unclear about a result. Jesus told us not to fear because He desired to GIVE US the kingdom. Because this is so sure, because God does not hold back or deprive us of what is good, we are to live practically in a way that recognizes true value. We are to sell our possessions to help those in need, because we know our stuff is temporary and we are not trying to store up real estate for the future. We are to **invest** our money in lasting areas, where the destructive properties of a dying world cannot effect.

PRINCIPLE: *Where my treasure is, my heart will also be*

Our treasure, those things that have been provided by God beyond our needs, reveal what we truly value. It is often these things that make us anxious to gain and fearful to lose. We know that God wants our heart, to love Him with all of it. If we treasure the things of this world over the future kingdom and its King, it will be evident in **where we store it, how we value it, and what we seek after**. In order to stay ready for Christ's return, we must put our treasure in its proper place - to care for others, to help, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous, ready to share (1 Tim. 6:18-19) - to make sure our heart is soft toward Christ. We need to learn from Lot's wife who upon leaving the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah while being destroyed, looked back at the life she had, and became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). She treasured what she had more than WHO she served.

Being Awake and Alert when He Returns (35-40)

"**Stay dressed** for action and **keep your lamps burning**, and be like men who are **waiting** for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds **awake** when He comes. Truly I say to you, He will dress Himself for service and have them recline at table, and He will come and serve them. If He comes in the **second watch** or in the **third**, and finds them **awake**, blessed are those servants.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. **You also must BE READY, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**"

- **Awake to the reality of imminent return**

Jesus turns the discussion to readiness with a new parable. He describes a scene of a group of house servants taking care of their master. They are a devoted bunch. They love the master. He leaves to attend a wedding, which could often mean a week of festivities, or until the party was over. The picture is of these servants seeing their master off and then staying in the ready for their return. They would stay dressed, girded up in their uniforms to serve when he got there. They'd keep their lamps lit and wicks clipped so there would be light when the master came to the door. Jesus mentioned the 2nd and 3rd watches, which would have been the **10pm - 2M shift**, and the **2am - 6am shift**. In other words, they were ready at ANY and EVERY hour for the return of their master, and would open the door for Him when He walked up, ready to give him food, refreshment, and whatever else he needed.

Clearly, Jesus is referring to us being ready for His return. But here is the amazing part of this scene. Notice what the master does. It says the master will come in and **serve them!** We not only saw this when Jesus washed the disciples feet (John 13:1-10), but also anticipates the time when Jesus will

recline with His bride , where the first will be last and the last first (Luke 13:28-29; Rev. 19:6-10). The blessing for those who are faithful is that they will dine with Jesus, and live with Him forever.

- **Alert to the reality of unknown return**

The second parable or picture was that of a thief who would come in when the master was gone. The thief had cased the place, and entered in when no one expected. If the thief had announced himself, or if the master had caught wind of the plan they would have stayed. However, the master did not know when the thief would come, so had to be ready for anything. The principle that Jesus gets across to us is rather clear:

PRINCIPLE: *Jesus is coming when we do not expect - but make no mistake, He is coming*

So how do we remain ready, on the alert?

1) **It starts with salvation** - We have already seen this in Luke 9:24-26, that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, not being ashamed of Him or His words when He comes in His glory. In **1 Thess. 1:9-10** the mark of turning from the world to Christ was waiting for Christ's return; "*For they themselves report concerning us the king of reception we had among you, and how you **turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come***" Salvation moves us from fear to love, and also from apathy to anticipation. A true child of God has turned from worldly pursuit to wait, longingly for the Lord.

2) **It continues with sanctification** - 2 Peter 3:14 - "*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these (the destruction of the earth described in 10-13), be diligent to be found by him without spot of blemish.*" While we are here, we are to live in a way that reflects the fact that we actually believe He can return in our lifetime. Sin dulls us to this reality. It makes us comfortable with ourselves in this world. We believe salvation is easy, leading to an easy life, instead of being exhausted by our battle with our own sin and the system of this world, longing for Christ's return.

3) **It ends with satisfaction** - Rev. 21:1-5 - So we long for the true reality of our life that is NOT found in this life but in the one to come. We weep, mourn, and suffer pain today knowing that all of that will be wiped away tomorrow. We work hard today knowing that we will be reunited with our loving spouse forever. Much like I long to see my wife today after 50 + hours of being gone, we long for Christ, to see Him face to face.

Do you long to see Christ? Do you long to be with Him, to dine with Him, to serve Him? If not, you will not anticipate nor be prepared for His imminent return.

Being Prepared and Diligent with what He Entrusted (41-48)

"Peter said, 'Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?' And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. **Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.**

But, if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins 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 does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get **ready** or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.

but the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating.

Everyone to whom much was given of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, much they will demand the more."

- **Example & Reward of a Faithful Servant**

Peter interrupted the discussion with a question about the scope of whom Jesus was addressing. Jesus did not answer this directly, but in His answer He tells us about **2 distinct categories** of servant, those who were faithful and those who weren't, those who received reward and those judgment. Since all people in all the world fit in one or the other, all are implicated.

The first group are those who are **faithful and sensible**, who live out the reality of salvation in all of life. This group lives with a sense of **urgency**, knowing that there are only so many days to be obedient and faithful. They are willing to oversee others (especially those that are made disciples - the fruit of faithful evangelism and relationship), and are willing to see themselves first and foremost servants of the King (no greater title to possess). In a world where pastors are seen as celebrities and anyone who believes there is a God is considered a Christian, true faithfulness shows itself by **humble, consistent, tireless, God glorifying work** that comes from the work of Jesus on the cross and the Spirit that empowers. This servant not only receives the reward of eternity with Christ, but reward of responsibility

- **Example & Judgment of a Foolish Servant**

This faithful servant is juxtaposed with the example of the faithless servant. This one was a charlatan, feigning to be a servant but was truly in it for himself. While the master was away he acted like there was no master except him (call it "practical atheism"). Believing that he could live by his own rules, treat others by his own standards, and live for his own pleasure, this servant abused those around him (beating the other servants) and indulged as a hedonist (getting drunk). It was "eat, drink, and be merry", but also was living the American dream with no thought or care of Christ's return. There was a profession of faith by no change, no transformation, no salvation.

Jesus teaches **2 important principles about this servant:**

1) This servant who acted this way in light of the masters return, who acted in His own interest and according to his own will, will be "cut to pieces and put with the unfaithful". In other words this servant was NOT going to taste the wedding feast with the master, but would find himself outside of God's house and in a place of judgment

2) All unfaithful servants would be judged, sentenced to life outside of eternity with God, but there were be differing levels of severity. The first who knew and actively opposed would be cut to pieces. The one who knew the masters will and was passive toward God's will and Jesus' return would receive a beating, and the one who was ignorant to all and acted in unbelief received a light beating. What does this all mean? It means that all received judgment, for there is no salvation without faith, yet it was those who **KNEW** the truth and acted contrary to it, they received the most severe punishment. With much information, with much opportunity, with all the resources available, the unfaithful servant should not only have lived out what he knew, but should have informed those who were under his charge. This leaves us with the indelible principle:

PRINCIPLE: *When much is given, much is expected. When much is entrusted, much is required.*

What does that mean for us? We have been entrusted with a great treasure (1 Tim. 1:11). We have access to God's Word, to teaching, and a proliferation of information. We are not uninformed as to the return of Christ, and know what happens in the end. The question is: what are we doing with it? Are we striving for easy lives without risk? Are we reveling in ignorance by not pursuing God through His Word? Are we living in a way that believes Jesus could return at any moment, not in fear, but in hopeful anticipation?

If I told you an earthquake was going to hit Simi tomorrow, what would you do tonight? If you thought Jesus could return tomorrow, what would you do? His return reveals our treasure, our belief, and our faithfulness. Let's live faithfully, joyfully preparing for Jesus' return.

Questions to Discuss:

- **What aspects of our heart is revealed by what we seek after?**
- **What are things that we are afraid of? How does it affect us? What does all of this show about what we treasure?**
- **If Jesus truly could return anytime, what would that practically mean for us daily? How would life be different if we lived in light of that truth?**
- **How do we train our minds to be faithful while we wait for Jesus' return? What would it look like to live like the unfaithful servant, especially those who claim to know Christ?**