

STUDY 7 Luke 12:41-48

Just imagine for a moment that you are a teacher, and you are passionate about your subject, and about the difference knowing the subject will make to your pupils. Then suddenly one of the pupils puts their hand up. "Sir, will this be in the exam"?

Jesus has one of those moments during this great sermon he is preaching in Luke 12. He has been teaching about the vital importance of being ready for his return. He knows he won't be physically present on this earth for ever – he has already set his face towards Jerusalem. The last two thirds of the gospel of Luke take place as Jesus makes his way to that city where he knows he will be crucified, rise from the dead, and ascend to his Father in heaven. He knows there is coming a time when he will be physically absent from his church, and they will have to live knowing that. But Jesus wants his disciples to live knowing he will return soon. We should live actively obeying him, and looking forward to that day coming when he will return and serve us.

In the middle of this urgent teaching there is an interruption. It's easy to guess which of the disciples pipes up – it's always Peter! "Er, Jesus, is this relevant to us? Will it be in the exam?" See verse 41 – "Are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"

Perhaps I'm being a bit too harsh on Peter. After all, there are a lot of people listening to Jesus at this point. There is a crowd of thousands, and there is the smaller group of disciples. Jesus has already been distinguishing between them. So perhaps it is a genuine question. Who should be listening to Jesus? Who is to get ready for his return?

Jesus is used to interruptions as he speaks. He doesn't answer the question directly. He tells another parable. But we'll see the answer is that Jesus is talking to everyone, but what he is saying has particular relevance to Peter, the disciples and all those he will appoint to lead and teach his people while he is absent.

In verses 35-40 Jesus has used the image of a household to teach about being ready for his return, and he continues that image from verse 42 onwards.

THE STEWARD'S ROLE

"Who then is the faithful and wise manager (or steward), whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?"

Jesus has likened all of his disciples to servants who work in a house – which is clearly meant to be the church – who work and wait for the return of the master (who is Jesus). Now Jesus is talking about a particular kind of servant, the manager,

STUDY 7 Luke 12:41-48

the steward. In those days a steward was a particular kind of servant who was left in charge of a master's household. His particular responsibility was to look after the other servants so everything would work well.

That's how Jesus uses the image here. The master has put this steward "in charge", but it's not so he can throw his weight around. We can be tempted to grasp at those positions with titles so we can have power and prestige and a pay rise.

But this is a position of greater service. This important role is serving lunch. The master puts him in charge "to give them their food allowance at the proper time". It seems like a menial task – but it's vital. Just think about family home, or back to your childhood. What would it have been like if your mum (or whoever it was or is) didn't cook your dinner every night and prepare your pack lunch and buy the breakfast things? Growing up I took it for granted, but had my mum stopped it would have been a disaster. Three men who couldn't cook surviving for themselves! There's only so much beans on toast you can eat! But that didn't happen, so we could live and work.

Though Jesus is leaving he has provided for his church. He has given his church stewards, those appointed and equipped to lead, but it's a serving role – and the role is to feed the household. This role in Jesus' household is to feed everyone with God's word. That's the food we eat. That's what keeps us going.

Jesus is not abandoning his household like some dad running away from his family. No, he's given us what we need to keep going and he's appointed men to give it out.

After Jesus resurrection Jesus is on the banks of the Galilee talking to Peter – the one who asked "is this teaching meant for me?" It's a moving scene. Peter had denied Christ as he was taken away. Jesus asks Peter "do you love me?" three times. Peter says "yes". Then Jesus says – do you remember? "Feed my sheep". Jesus is appointing Peter as a steward. Then he spends the rest of his life preaching the good news, teaching and writing God's word to feed Jesus household.

Then as the apostles die, they don't appoint new apostles, but they pass on the role of stewarding to other men, like Titus and Timothy, who are to pass on the role to others. The role is the of a steward, holding on to God's word and faithfully teaching and preaching it and passing it on. That is the role of those who are set over God's house. To teach. To preach. To be prepared in and out of season. To be convinced

STUDY 7 Luke 12:41-48

that all Scripture is God breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

God's word is the food of the servants of God. God's word gives life and preserves life. Just as we need food to keep going, we need God's word to keep us going as Christians. If we aren't fed with the word of God, what happens? Well, we stop being ready for Jesus' return. Our obedience fails. Not just because we don't know what to do, but because God uses his word to bring us life itself. Our watchfulness fails. The church that stops being fed with God's word stops looking out for the master to return. We forget he's coming back. We forget the urgency of his return.

Although this has immediate application to pastors, actually it applies to all of us here today. Because it helps us see what you need most to keep you watching and waiting for Jesus return. What do you most want from your leaders in church? Jesus says what we most need, and what you should demand and encourage and pray for is stewards who feed you with the word of God.

Sometimes expectations of stewards don't help them do what they are called of God to do, and what we all need them to do. To feed us. Now this doesn't mean being invisible Monday- Saturday, and just popping up in the pulpit on Sunday. "Giving food at the proper time" could be any time. Yes, the meal times when the family eats together, but other times as well. Personally, one to one, in small group settings. But the role is teaching the word of God in all its forms. The churches that are most faithfully waiting for Jesus returns are the churches that are fed.

THE MASTER'S RETURN

And that brings us on to the second (shorter point), and that's the Master's return. Because Jesus is coming back, and everyone, especially the stewards should have their eyes on that. Because who does the steward answer to? The master. He is responsible for the servants, but answerable to the master.

This role of feeding the household is so vital that there are promises and warnings that go with the role of stewarding. Look at verse 43 and 44. It will be great for the stewards Jesus finds doing what Jesus has called them to do. There is a reward – but again notice what it is. More serving. "He will put him in charge of all his possessions".

There is a serious warning to unfaithful stewards in verses 45 and 46. There may be some stewards who don't do what Jesus asks. Who use their position as a way of

STUDY 7 Luke 12:41-48

throwing their weight around. Who eat the food and don't feed the sheep. Jesus says – when he returns he will deal with them. He will send them to hell. That's the force of verse 46 "assign them a place with the unbelievers". Just because you have a position in the church here doesn't mean you get a free pass to heaven without repentance and faith in Christ.

But why does Jesus even say this? Isn't he being a bit pessimistic? Jesus is speaking about his future, but he's also aware of the past and his present. God's people up to this point have suffered a great deal from unfaithful stewards. The prophets are full of prophecies against leaders who have abused the people and not fed them – read Ezekiel 34 for a shocking example. And on the day this sermon in Luke 12 is preached, we need to remember who else Jesus has in his sights - The Pharisees.

He began Luke 12 by warning the disciples of the yeast of the Pharisees, and they were doing the same thing. Putting heavy burdens on the people and not helping them. Not leading people to Jesus. Jesus is saying – don't be like them. They will be judged, look at their end and don't use them as your example of leadership. They may be respected now, but when Jesus returns, they will be seen to be unbelievers and punished severely.

These are serious warnings, but I hope we find them a comfort. They tell us something about how much Jesus loves us. Jesus' church is extremely valuable to him. He cares so much that he takes very seriously the stewardship of it.

When we hear about domestic abuse we get angry don't we? How did you feel when you heard about the baby P case a few years ago, or other cases of neglect and suffering? It's wicked, especially when it was parents neglecting their children. But that's nothing compared to how serious Jesus takes the stewardship of his church.

These verses are a comfort. Jesus takes spiritual abuse very seriously indeed. You might be thinking "I can't trust Jesus, I've seen how some vicars, or priests or pastors behave, I've suffered at their hands". Well, know Jesus sees, he cares, they will be dealt with.

What does Jesus want? Later in his life Peter writes about stewards in the church at the end of his letter and I think expands on what Jesus taught him here. (1 Peter 5:2-4). The exact opposite of these unfaithful stewards.

STUDY 7 Luke 12:41-48

THE SON'S WARNING

Jesus concludes this section of his sermon by widening the application out again in verses 47 and 48.

There will be a time of reckoning for everyone when Jesus returns. For some who claim to be part of the house of God, like the Pharisees and the unfaithful steward Jesus return will show them to have no part in it. For other stewards in particular they may be part of the household but as Paul seems to indicate in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 they suffer some kind of loss (their work is burnt up, they weren't faithful) – that may be what Jesus is referring to in verses 47 and 48.

But the force of the warning of verse 48 stands out as Jesus speaks. The more we know the more we will be accountable for.

“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”. And the many thousands who were listening to Jesus had been given much. Not all of them were apostles. Not all of them would be preachers and church leaders. But they'd all just been listening to Jesus in the flesh telling them about the future, calling them to be ready for his return. They are all in the category of “those who've been given much”.

And that's true for all of us here. None of us can say we were never told that Jesus was going to return. None of us can say we weren't told to be dressed ready for service and to keep our lamps burning. So we are accountable for what we know.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS (Please add/adapt, especially with applicatory questions)

What has Jesus just been speaking about? What is Peter's question? (Vs 41)

What is the responsibility of the manager that Jesus has set over his household?

What does this tell us about what Jesus' household need most?

What does this tell us about the most important responsibility of those Jesus appoints to roles in his household?

What encouragement does Jesus give?

Why might Jesus delay in returning lead to those servants doing? What might this look like in churches today? (Vs 45)

STUDY 7 Luke 12:41-48

What serious warning does Jesus bring? (vs 46). What does this tell us about how much Jesus loves his church?

What do we learn about the justice of Jesus' judgement (vs 46-48)?

Who might Jesus be thinking about as he tells this parable and gives these warnings?

Remember 12:1-11