

# ARE YOU PREPARED FOR JESUS' SECOND COMING?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

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According to a recent ad in a national newspaper taken out by a group called *Mission for the Coming Days*, Jesus is coming again in autumn 1992 to rapture his church, and then seven years later in 1999 human history will end. At the same time there is a Jewish group in New York City that is making preparations to welcome their Messiah to this earth for the first time on September 9 of this year. There are thousands of religious as well as nonreligious groups that believe that Jesus came to this earth the first time but do not believe he will come a second time. But the Christian community, which is not only committed to the truth of the word of God, but seeks to understand God's heart, believes that Jesus is coming to this earth again "in the twinkling of an eye," as the final Judge for the nations. Within that context some of us think he is coming soon, and some think he will come some time but are more concerned with their present ministries. Others among us call themselves followers of Jesus Christ, but they are living out their lifestyles before us as if there will be no accounting to Jesus Christ for the stewardship of their lives, talents, spiritual gifts, and opportunities to serve him during their short stay on this earth.

Well, according to Jesus Christ, as recorded in Luke 12:35-48, he is coming again, not as the Savior of the world, but as the final Judge, and then he will bless the faithful servants, and the unfaithful servants will come into judgment. It is at this point in the teaching that our Lord gave the disciples the third of five warnings. He had warned them to avoid hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-12) and to guard against greed and worry (Luke 12:13-34). Now he warns them to seek the kingdom of God, and in so doing they will be prepared for the second return of their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In light of that reality, are you prepared for Jesus' second coming?

## **I. Keep alert: Jesus is coming again**

Luke 12:35-40

"Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps alight. And be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. And be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

In the Middle East at that time a rich man would have a large household, and he needed many servants to help him maintain the property, fields, etc. He was known as the lord or master, and he was vested with unquestioned authority. Then there was the office of stewardship, which was held by those who were responsible to their lord for the administration of the household. These stewards were either freemen or bondslaves, and they were responsible to care for not only the property but all the other servants within that household. The steward was responsible to the master for everything that was going on. The key to a well-run household was to have a faithful steward who was willing to fulfill the will of the master. Within that household, all the servants knew that with faithfulness came blessings, but unfaithfulness brought punishment.

In the immediate context our Lord Jesus would have been thinking of the household as the nation of Israel, but in the future he would think of the household of God as the church. Within the nation of Israel the household stewards would have been the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the servants the common people who sought to worship God. In the future the household stewards and slaves would be represented by the elders, pastors, deacons and members of a local Christian church. Our Lord was standing in the midst of a large crowd and took advantage of this "teachable moment" to alert them to the tremendous consequences of their response to his words, of either blessing to the faithful, or judgment to the unfaithful.

First, they were to be dressed in readiness. Our Lord gave the disciples a very familiar picture from that culture. It appears that the master had gone away to a wedding feast for several days, but then the time came for him to return. So the chief servant called all the others in the house and informed them that they were to gird their loins (literally, to tuck the back part of the long, flowing robes they wore up into their belts so they would be ready to function) and stand by the door so that when the master knocked, the door would be immediately flung open, and he could enter in and find his house in order and servants ready to serve him.

Now, when the Messiah himself came the first time, only a few were looking for him. Mary and Joseph, once told by the angel, responded quickly and opened their hearts to him. You may remember that in Luke 2:25-35 Mary and Joseph took our Lord up to Jerusalem right after his circumcision so they could offer a sacrifice. And there they met a righteous and devout man named Simeon who was looking for the consolation of Israel, and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. There was also an aged widow and prophetess named Anna who had been looking for the Messiah and was privileged to see him at the same time. But there were not many others, so it wasn't a great welcome when he first came. So our Lord warned his disciples to be prepared for his second coming.

Then they were to keep their lamps alight. The first-century household had little oil lamps consisting of a cotton wick floating in a sauce-boat of oil. This wick had to be kept trimmed and the lamp replenished with oil or the light would soon go out, leaving the household in darkness. According to this passage it appears that the Lord would return to a darkened world, and he wanted to find his disciples shining as "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). For he had called them and set them aside so that by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (symbolized by the oil), the light of his character and the hope of his message of salvation would shine through their lives and into the darkened minds of the unbelievers all around them, resulting in their redemption, until he returned again.

I was reminded of this just a week and a half ago. I was at the Garden Court restaurant for breakfast with B.J. Fregly, and a young woman came up to take our order. I said, "Hi, what's your name?" She told us her name was Kathy, and then as I was ordering, I told her I used to meet there in a Bible study for businessmen, called Agora. I said, "I don't remember you, but I do remember a busboy I made friends with named Hector." She said, "Oh, yes, he's here. His wife just lost her second baby, and he's really depressed. Maybe you could help him." So I said, "Sure."

Then she asked me what I did, and I said, "Well, I tell people about Jesus when they're interested. Are you interested?" She replied, "I'm into Zen." She went on, "Do you guys really teach the Bible?" I said yes. She said, "Well, I'm into the Psalms, and I don't understand them." I gave her my name and phone number and told her to call me. Then Kathy saw Hector and brought him over. And right in the middle of this very busy breakfast hour, I said, "Hector, I heard you've had a rough morning. Don't say anything, I'm just going to pray for you." I started praying for him right in the restaurant, and the guy couldn't believe it. After breakfast we started off, and he came over and said, "And pray for me Friday, will you?" And as we walked out the door, Kathy was saying, "I'll call you!"

You see, we're called to be light. You think you're going to breakfast, but you're not-that's just a cover! Do you understand what God is doing? He wants us to be light, faithful servants where the light is always burning, dispelling darkness for other people.

Next, Jesus told his disciples they were to stand by the front door. Why? Because he is coming again! He was telling them about the master's going away to a wedding. A Jewish wedding at that time would last some seven days, and then all the guests would have a final toast and return home. Our Lord was looking past the

cross to the wonderful resurrection, ascension, and then his second coming as the risen Lord and Savior, first invisible for his church, and then visible, in which "...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11.)

Finally, the master would bless the faithful servants. This is a fabulous verse! The publishers of the German Bible say this is the most fulfilling verse that they can think of in their Bible. It says when the master returned to his home and knocked on the door, and the alert servants immediately opened the door and ushered him into his own home, he looked around and found not only his servants in readiness for his return but also the house in order and all the lamps lit. In order to fulfill their master's wishes the servants had set aside their own personal goals, hopes and dreams. And this faithfulness so filled the master's heart with joy that he called in all his faithful servants and ordered them to sit down at the dinner table. Then he girded himself and began to serve them at the table and meet their needs. This was quite contrary to local custom, but a few months later we would find our Lord literally doing this in the upper room during the Last Supper with his disciples: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that he had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." (John 13:3-5.) It's a beautiful picture, isn't it? The Creator of the universe is going to wash the feet of all the faithful servants throughout the ages. It's going to be awesome!

Then Jesus told them to be careful, for we don't know when the Lord is coming. It may be the second watch (between 9:00 pm and midnight) or the third watch (midnight to 3:00 am). It really doesn't matter, for we are men and women who are serving Jesus Christ in such a way that no matter whether he comes today or tomorrow, we always have an awareness that he is present. We know his word is true, and since he said, "I'm coming again," we know he is. Be ready! Don't keep looking at your watches, and don't arrange your life as if he won't come one day but he may come some other day. The servants (bondslaves) within the household that our Lord was speaking of were so faithful and so alert that it didn't bother them that they didn't know at exactly what hour he would return.

Jesus gave an illustration to help with this idea. As contrary to nature as it would have been for a thief to announce to the house master of a rich household when he was going to break in (in the Greek, dig a hole through the wall of the house) and steal all that was of value in that home, so it is contrary to the behavior of the master to announce when he's going to return. It's his house, and he is free to show up any time he wants. He doesn't have to give anybody a warning. He's in charge, and he has a plan that he wants his faithful servants to be part of. So he's saying, "Just keep on doing what you've been called to do until the moment I arrive."

And in the same way it's contrary to the plans of our Lord to announce to the world when he is going to come back to this earth as the risen Lord and Judge. In the Scriptures we discover that our risen and glorified Lord Jesus will come again to this earth in two stages. The first stage is called "the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10) and will be his invisible coming. As a "thief in the night" or "at an hour you know not," our Lord will return to this earth for his children sometime before the great and terrible tribulation mentioned in Daniel and in Revelation. We who love him and have given our lives to him will see him, but the world of unbelievers will not see him.

The second stage is called "the day of the Lord," which will occur at the end of the seven-year tribulation. The whole world will see our Lord's visible return to this earth with his saints and his mighty angels in flaming fire to judge the nations and establish his divine rule on earth for a thousand years. Some twenty years after this account, the apostle Paul would write to the true servants of our risen Lord in Thessalonica, "...you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day." (1 Thessalonians 5:2-5.)

Then addressing the Pharisees, our Lord warned, "You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect." The Son of Man title portrays Jesus as the representative man, the "last Adam" in

contrast to the first, sinful Adam, the Lord from heaven in contrast to the man from earth. And it is within this name that salvation is offered to the whole human race. The Son of Man was mentioned in Daniel 7:13-14: "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." The Son of Man in his first coming was very visible, but the nation of Israel rejected him as well as his kingdom. So the next time he comes for his own servants, he will come as a thief in the night and gather his faithful to himself before his awesome visible coming to judge the world. Keep alert!

Now, many of us will experience his second coming event at our own last breath on this earth, our physical death. It really doesn't matter, because either way, you never lose consciousness. Psalm 23:4 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me." I walk through death, but I don't experience death. So for all of us who experience the Lord's second coming through our physical death, it's the same thing as his visible coming for his children. A dear friend and faithful servant of our Lord Jesus Christ was on his death bed at El Camino Hospital, and I came into his room to sit and pray with him. After a few moments John looked at me and said, "Ron, can you hear the music? Do you see the Lord?" I said, "No John, I don't." And with a big smile he said, "Ron, it's so beautiful." And in that moment he was called to join our risen Lord in his second coming. I didn't see any of it, but he saw it all.

Are you prepared for Jesus' second coming? Keep alert; he really is coming, and...

## **II. Remain faithful: Jesus is coming again**

Luke 12:41-48

And Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming, and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave 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 assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

Peter said, "Lord, are you addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" Jesus replied, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?" Our Lord didn't answer Peter's question at first, but rather opened up the whole issue of what it means to be a faithful servant and the rewards that follow, and what it means to be an unfaithful servant and the punishment that follows. Let's look at each for a moment.

First, the faithful servant: The chief steward in any given household was not only responsible to take care of the property and keep alert against the possibility of thieves, but he was also to care for and feed the other household slaves. It appears that our Lord was surely inviting the Pharisees as well as anyone in the crowd to acknowledge him as their Messiah and Master and be willing to serve him in the household of God. Those who accept that invitation understand that in their relationship with Jesus, the new life they have is no longer their own, but it is bought with a price, and they are willing to leave all and serve him. He was also inviting the Pharisees to be faithful shepherds to the nation of Israel as his Father had called them to be, which they were not at the moment. There was still opportunity.

Jesus' teaching here was a reminder as well to the disciples who were called to build the church of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. He had told Peter on an earlier occasion that he was going away, but before he went away he was giving him a task. He would build the church upon the fact which Peter had already confessed, that he was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall [have been] bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall [have been] loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19.) This teaching was in fact a reminder of the Great Commission our risen Lord gave his disciples: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20.) And the apostle Paul would gather the elders of the church of Ephesus together and remind them of their spiritual responsibilities until the Lord returned: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:27-28.)

"Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions." A good and faithful servant has a heart commitment to his master to live and work as if the master were always present. (And he is always present!) So once the master returns, the servant has only to continue in the task that his master assigned him and live a life that brings honor to his master's name. This may also mean that those bondservants of Christ who are faithful on earth will be given joyful responsibilities in eternity. The aged Peter would write to the second generation of believers in Turkey some thirty years after this event and a few months before his own death, "...I exhort the elders..., shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." (1 Peter 5:1-4.) The joy of serving our Lord Jesus on earth will continue in heaven; this is part of the "eternal weight [responsibility] of glory" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:17.

Now let's look at the unfaithful servant. "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk...." Your actions betray your heart in time, for a faithful servant never lives as if his master were away, for in his heart and mind his master is always present. So he lives as if his master were physically present. The answer, therefore, to Peter's question, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" was, "Peter, I'm addressing this parable to anyone who says they are truly my followers, for in due time one's actions will betray his heart. The actions of a faithful servant will show in the way he is preparing for the master's return. The actions of an unfaithful servant will become clear in time in the way he is not prepared for the master's return. (Remember, standing in the crowd listening to the words of Jesus were the Pharisees and Judas.) And if you think you can cover up and make people think you're a faithful servant when your heart is not committed to the Master, I want you to know that in time your actions will give you away. You will produce who you are out of your heart."

When the master returns, should he find any unfaithful servants, he will bring them to immediate judgment. Jesus gave three cases: (1) Should he find an unfaithful servant whose actions betrayed his heart commitment to his master in his mistreatment of the servants and wasting of his resources, he will be severely punished and he will be assigned a place with unbelievers. And unless he repents of his wicked ways, he will eventually be placed in hell. (2) Should the master return and find an unfaithful servant who was not carrying out his master's will, he will receive many lashes. (3) Should he return and find a servant exercising his unfaithfulness in ignorance, he will receive a few lashes. But all three servants in each of the above cases picture men and women whose actions betrayed their hearts, and they were never true servants of their Master. The bottom line is that all will be punished and placed outside the household with unbelievers, which is a symbol of hell. This is serious! The consequences are life and death, eternal blessing or eternal judgment. At the moment that Jesus comes back, the offer of salvation ends and the servants are judged.

Finally, Jesus gave them two eternal spiritual principles. First, he said, "And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required..." On the positive side of the coin, the Christian church would be greatly blessed by the Lord through the faithful lives of the apostles. Jesus had invested his life and the truth of his

second coming into them and he expected them to remain faithful to him and to that truth in the days ahead (a time which we now call the Age of the Spirit). We know that all of the apostles, except Judas, remained faithful to Jesus and to his teaching about his second coming. For example, some thirty years after this event, Peter wrote to the Christian community in northwest Turkey about some who were mocking the coming of the Lord, saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." Peter replied, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:3-11.) John would write to the same churches after the deaths of Peter and Paul, "And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." (1 John 2:28.) Paul, the latecomer, writing to the Thessalonians some 20 years after these words were spoken, said, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.)

On the negative side of this coin, the Lord was addressing (1) Pharisees who were in the crowd. It was these spiritual leaders of Israel who had been given the Law and the Prophets in which the Master of the household, the God of Israel, had told them about the first coming of their Messiah, and they had missed it. And now in their blindness they would miss the second coming of Messiah Jesus as Lord of lords and King of kings, and thus their judgment would be eternal separation from the presence of God and eternal wailing and gnashing of teeth. Within a few months Judas would betray Jesus. A few years later the apostle Paul would write from his Roman prison cell to his spiritual son Timothy living in Ephesus, "Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds." (2 Timothy 4: 9-14.) Some sixty years after the Lord spoke the words in this account, the aged apostle John would write to his dear friend Gaius, warning him about a church leader named Diotrephes: "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God." (3 John 9-11.)

The second eternal spiritual principle Jesus gave was, "...and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." The Pharisees, the Jews within the crowd, and the disciples had received much spiritual light from the Law and the Prophets as well as from the life and ministry of their Lord, Messiah Jesus. In light of all that truth, our Lord was warning these three different groups that they were all going to be held accountable to God for what they did with the truth they had been given. At the same time our Lord was encouraging them that if one is entrusted with much truth and he is faithful with that truth, he will gain even greater responsibilities.

Thirty years ago I used to stand on platforms like this and in classrooms and teach hundreds of people the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was only one thing missing-the people! I used to teach in open, empty rooms. And I asked God if he would fill those rooms some day. The principle is that he will if we're faithful in the small things. So my wife and I started teaching nine-, ten-, and eleven-year-olds. It wasn't quite what I had in mind! But that is what God had in mind. All these rooms were empty then. I just had a Bible, a little bit of faith, a lot of arrogance, no experience, and a heart that wanted to serve God. And that's all it takes-just a heart that wants to serve God. Then God will reward faithfulness in small things with greater responsibilities.

Paul would write to the Corinthians in years to come, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." (1 Corinthians 4:1-2.) Peter would write to the Asian Christians: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10.) Paul said just before he was to be beheaded on the Appian Way under the cruel sword of Nero, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought

the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8.)

Are you prepared for Jesus' second coming? Our heavenly Father sent his Son to this earth the first time to offer all of us who were dead in our trespasses and sins the hope of salvation, if we would invite Jesus into our hearts as Lord. In this age of the Spirit which came into existence after our Lord's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension on the day of Pentecost, our risen Lord is still offering the hope of salvation to all who believe in him as Lord. Once we accept him as our Lord, he places us into his household and gives us spiritual gifts and areas of responsibility to spread the good news of our redemption through our Lord Jesus. In the midst of our ministries we are called to remain faithful to our Lord by being dressed in readiness and keeping our lamps lit with the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that men and women all around us will be drawn out a world of darkness into the kingdom of light. We are also called to keep alert in the midst of all this ministry, knowing that the invisible but always present Lord will return, and then he will bring blessing to those servants who are faithful and judgment to those servants who are unfaithful.

Jesus is coming again. The first time he came with the offer of salvation; the second time the world will see him rule and reign on this earth as the righteous Judge. If we reject his wonderful offer of salvation now, we will have to meet him as our Judge at the time of our death or in his glorious second coming. Since now is the day of salvation, I beg you, don't put off his offer of salvation today. You may not have another day on this earth to make your decision.

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Catalog No. 4154  
Luke 12:35-48  
39th Message  
Ron Ritchie  
July 21, 1991

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