

# Parables of Jesus

Message 3

## *Ready for Justice*

Luke 12:35-48

### *Where is Justice?*

There are times when a disaster strikes that is so tragic, we hardly have the strength to become angry. Perhaps you have seen or read about the massacre of the Russian school children at the hands of terrorists. Let me read a few lines from a web article I clipped yesterday.

BESLAN, Russia — A numb Russia observed the first national day of mourning for the more than 350 victims of the terrorist school seizure on Monday, while foreign planes delivered medical supplies to this grief-stricken southern region neighboring Chechnya (search).

In Beslan, townspeople crowded around the coffins of children, parents, grandparents and teachers ahead of the 120 burials scheduled in the town cemetery and adjoining fields.

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The paroxysm of violence left few families untouched in this tight-knit, mostly industrial town, whose population of 30,000 belies a village atmosphere in which many leave their doors unlocked. Most people in Beslan had a relative, friend or neighbor killed or wounded.

The official death toll stood at 335 Monday, not including the 30 slain attackers; the regional health ministry said 326 of the dead had been hostages, and the Emergency Situations Ministry said 156 of the dead were children.<sup>1</sup>

That is the report. And if you saw the pictures of injured, dead, and dying children, your heart must have broken over this sad, sad event. How can such atrocities occur? Why did this have to happen? People everywhere – Christians, Muslims, and atheists alike – wonder where is God, and why did He allow such suffering? And as we recover from the shock, we must wonder, where is justice? And if there is a God, will He punish those responsible for such an evil act?

### *Where is the Judge?*

The context for tonight's parable is a question of justice. Way back in verse 13 someone in the crowd had said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Apparently this man felt cheated by his brother and wanted Jesus to resolve the dispute. What is notable about Jesus' reply is that He avoided the question and brought up the issue of covetousness.

Now what is the root of all such disputes? What drives them and gives them their intensity? It's covetousness, isn't it? You want what someone else has, and you want it badly enough to disturb the peace to get it. That is why Jesus immediately responded with the parable of The Rich Fool, which we covered two weeks ago. His point there was that it is plainly foolish to live for wealth. What is worth living for is your spiritual health, your relationship with God. On the surface the rich fool looked prudent. In fact, we probably would have done as he did. He had so many crops, he had to build bigger barns to store them. The problem was not his bumper crop, though, but his godless life. He was so focused on his wealth, he forgot God. In the end he lost his wealth, and since he did not have God, he lost everything. Eternity will be a miserable place for this man. It is foolish to live for wealth. Wisdom is living for God.

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<sup>1</sup> "Russia Mourns Victims of School Terror Attack". September 06, 2004. *FoxNews*. 9/6/2004. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,131492,00.html>.

Jesus went on to elaborate this principle. In verses 22-34 He said we should not worry about wealth, or even daily necessities. Did you ever notice that God takes care of the flowers and birds? If God does this for things of small value, think how much He cares for you! He will always look after you, so you ought never to worry about your daily needs. Instead, you should be focused on God's Kingdom. In verse 31 He summarized, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." To the man worried about his inheritance Jesus is saying, compared to the worth and glory of God's Kingdom, your inheritance is a trivial issue. Get your mind off such matters and concern yourself with God's Kingdom instead. Jesus concluded this paragraph in verse 34 by saying, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." If you devote yourself to getting your share (or more) of this world's goods, your heart is not with God. Only by relinquishing your drive for worldly success can you truly love and serve God.

But Jesus introduced an other question in verse 14 which He then seemed to drop, "Who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Shrewd question. To us who are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as the divine Son of God, this could seem an *odd* question. We would think, no one made Jesus a judge, of course – it's just who Jesus is. But if that is the case, why would Jesus ask a dumb question? And if He is judge, why did He refuse to render judgment? Is justice something that concerns Jesus at all? Is Jesus saying, in effect, ignore the problems of this world and just work on getting to heaven? Today's parables answer this question.

### ***The Faithful Servants***

Now we come to verse 35 where Jesus says, "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning." "Gird" is a word we seldom use today, although it is a very good word. It essentially means get ready. In those days men wore long, flowing outer garments which were fine for walking or sitting, but would get in the way of energetic activity. When a man had to run, or haul, or carry, the robes could easily get in his way and cause him to trip. In such a case he would gather up the ends of his garment and tuck them into his belt so that he could move freely. Then he would be ready for work. When Jesus says, "Let your waist be girded", He is using a metaphor for getting ready to work. The same applies to the lamps. Oil lamps were used to light the way at night in those days. There were no street lights, and you could not light the room with the flick of a switch. It took awhile to get the lamp lit and burning properly. If you were expecting someone soon, you would light your lamp in advance.

Jesus had been discussing the Kingdom of God. In these parables He continues by discussing the relationship between the master and the servants. It should be easy to see how we fit into this parable. Obviously, God is the master, so that makes us the servants. Now what is the primary duty of the servants that is highlighted in verses 35-40? It is waiting. Notice the prevalence of the words "wait" and "watch" in verses 36, 37, and 39. These verses are really a blur of several parables. Shall we say that Jesus is guilty of mixed parables here?

First He paints a scene of a household where the master has gone to a wedding feast. He is out late and has left his servants in charge of the house. Everything is locked up to protect the property against robbers for remember, there are no street lights or police to ward off thieves. Until recently, night was a dangerous and frightening time. For centuries the church has prayed for safety at night using prayers like this:

Be our light in the darkness, O Lord, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; For the love of your only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Night is perilous, and travel at night is frightening. The master will be celebrating late into the night and will be coming home long after dark. He will rush to the safety of his house and hurry inside.

Now what will happen if he arrives home and his servants are all asleep? He will have to bang on the door to waken them. Remember, they have barricaded the door for safety. Meanwhile, the master is standing out in the dark, exposed to any evil that may lurk there. The servants pry open their eyes, roll out of bed, stumble to find a lamp, pull on their clothes... By the time they get dressed, get the lamp lit, and make their way to the door, their master will be furious! A man of dignity and means should never be kept waiting at his own door. The servants are the ones who should be waiting for him! He expects them to be awake, to be fully clothed – in fact, dressed for action! – and to have their lamps already lit. As soon as they hear footsteps on the pavement, they will jump to the door. As soon as they hear their master’s voice, they spring to unbar the door and swing it open to him. The master will be delighted with such servants. He will be so pleased – Jesus exaggerates here to press the point – he might even be delirious with satisfaction. He may give them an impromptu banquet – with himself as the servant!

The hitch is that the servants do not know when their master may come. It may be the second watch, or even the third watch. The night was divided into four sections – “watches”. From 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM was the first watch. The first set of guards would be on duty then. The second set of guards would watch from 9:00 PM to midnight, the third from midnight to 3:00 AM, and the fourth from 3:00 AM to 6:00 AM. These servants, however, must watch all the way until their master returns. It is a tough job, it requires perseverance, but those who succeed will be blessed. They will have the great honor of being served by their master himself.

Turning the characters around a bit, Jesus tells a one-verse parable about a master whose house is robbed by a thief. Everyone who reads mystery or war novels knows that the secret to success is the element of surprise. The thief must sneak into the house when no one is expecting him. If the master knew when the thief was coming, he would have been waiting for him – with a sword no doubt! But since he does not know when the thief will come, his only hope of protecting the house is to watch constantly.

Alright, so what is the point here? Why bother with all these parables? Jesus tells us very plainly. “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” This is it. Jesus is coming, and we must be ready. Like the good servants, we must be awake, ready for work, with our equipment in our hands.

Are you ready for Jesus to come? When He comes will He find you ready? Ready for what? Will Jesus find you serving in His household and ready to welcome Him? Are you seeking His Kingdom? Or are you seeking your own? Is your heart with Jesus? Are you by your service to God and man storing up treasure in heaven? Or are you off somewhere else storing up treasure for yourself. Will Jesus find you ready and waiting for Him, or busy with your own agenda? Let’s get to the bottom line. Would you be delighted if Jesus came back tonight, or would you be sorry He interrupted your plans?

I think this all makes sense when you stop to think about it. After all, the reason Jesus told parables was to force us to think deeply about spiritual issues. But I think everyone was a bit confused. Typically, Peter spoke up. I do not think his question really addresses the confusion, but rather reveals it. Peter was always willing to talk, even if he did not know what to say!

### ***The Evil Steward***

Jesus completes the matter in His next parable. Here He introduces another character – the steward. The steward was a prominent figure in a large household. He was sort of like the chief servant. He acted on behalf of the master. He oversaw the other servants, managed the property, took care of business, and keep the accounts. What is a faithful and wise steward like? He gives the other servants their portion of food in due season. He does not give them too much, for that would be wasteful; nor does he give them too little, for that would be mean. He gives them just the right amount, at just the right time. Such a man is blessed.

Surely he also handles all the master's business with care and skill. He will certainly be promoted. He will not only be steward over the household, he will become ruler over all the properties and assets of the master.

But what if the steward is lazy and greedy? What if he dines sumptuously himself, but skimps on the servants' portions? What if he gets drunk and beats the other servants? He could get away with this for awhile. The reason for having a steward was so that the household would run smoothly when the master was away. In his absence, the steward would be able to do as he pleased. The trouble is, someday the master will return. And then what? The master will not make a big noise as he returns. He will quietly approach to see how things are going. What will he do when he sees the steward brutally mistreating his servants? Will he fire him? Or beat him up as a punishment? Jesus says he will cut him in half! I would say that is a pretty definitive punishment! Furthermore, he will cast him with the unbelievers.

Here we see the master clearly in the role of judge. Not only is he evaluating the steward's behavior with the other servants, he is judging him spiritually as well. Furthermore, he is executing judgment – by throwing him off the premises, and by exiling him from the community of believers.

### ***Christ Will Return to Judge***

Now let's put all this together. A man came and said, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." He was asking Jesus to render a judgment regarding this dispute with his brother over their inheritance. Jesus replied, "Who made you a judge?" The implied answer is, "No one". The man spoke rightly when he addressed Jesus as a teacher – and although He was much more than a mere teacher (He was the Son of God) – He did not come at first to judge. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. He came seeking the lost to save them. So Jesus taught. He taught the deadly foolishness of living for wealth, and the wisdom of living for the Kingdom of God. Then He taught the importance of waiting. Faithful servants must wait for their master to return. So the servants of Jesus must wait for His return, "for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect." And when He returns, *then* there will be judgment, for Jesus will return as the judge!

The ministry of Jesus and its changing aspects is a large topic – one we do not have time to cover here. I will mention briefly, however, that although Jesus was never less divine than the Father and the Spirit, His ministry did not always include all the prerogatives of deity. One of the best explanations of this is in Phil. 2: 5-11. There it says Jesus

...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men...He humbled himself...Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Did you notice the title that Jesus used for himself in this parable? Son of Man. But after His death and resurrection, He is given the title of Lord. Jesus came and lived humbly as a man, but rose to be the exalted Lord and judge of all the earth.

### ***You Must Be Prepared***

The key point Jesus makes here is the need to be ready. In this life there will be injustices. At times we will be like servants waiting in the dark. Our master has gone away and left us in charge of certain things in his absence. We work and wait and wonder. People suffer, wrongs are committed, evil roams abroad. Children are killed in Russia, Christians are raped in the Sudan, girls are sold into prostitution in Thailand. Where is God? Why does He allow such things? Does He care? Yes, God does care! God will bring justice, but for now He gives wicked men a chance to forsake their evil ways. But there will come a day when Jesus returns to judge, and then He will set all things right.

Meanwhile we must not be lazy or greedy, but patiently wait for His return and be ready for Him when He arrives. If we have prepared ourselves and are ready for Him, we will be blessed. Jesus will rejoice over us He will serve us Himself at the heavenly banquet. But if we have become lazy and greedy, He will destroy us. He will cut us in two and cast us out with the unbelievers. In other words, He will send us to hell. This is a frightening possibility, but it need not ever happen to us – for we have been warned in advance. This passage tells us very clearly what to do to avoid such a fate.

Jesus will return again, this time as judge. He will come looking for people who are waiting patiently for Him, people who are eager to see Him, people who are busy doing the job He gave them to do. These are His own people, the ones who delight Him. These shall enjoy His pleasure forever. But many people are too busy or not interested in preparing for Jesus. These shall be dismayed when He arrives, for they will not be ready.

### ***Anyone Can Be Prepared***

The good news is that anyone can be ready! It doesn't take heroic efforts. All it takes is just doing what Jesus commands and waiting for Him. And what if you are not doing what Jesus commands? What if you are more like the servants who were partying or the steward who lived for pleasure and cared nothing about others? Jesus came precisely for you. This parable is exactly for those who are on the wrong track. You need to turn around and live in obedience. You need to get ready for Jesus' return. But Jesus will work in you to get ready. Jesus is alive and active in the world today, calling everyone to obedience, and giving us the power to obey His commands! If you have flagrantly indulged in much sin, or if you have imbibed a little sin, Jesus gives the power to get ready for His return.

Tonight, call upon Jesus to change you, so that you will no longer seek the treasures of this world. Call upon Jesus to make you a lover of God and a faithful servant in His Kingdom. Call upon Jesus to enable you to follow Him so that when He returns you will hear him say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." And as the early Christians used to say, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

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