



Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 12:35-59
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Choose To Be Ready for Christ's Return

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

In the past several weeks, we've seen Jesus address the Pharisees, His disciples, and the crowds. He's used strong words as He's challenged their thinking and behavior. The passage we'll look at today is closely linked with these earlier warnings. These warnings were intended to direct them away from a worldly mindset for deciding and evaluating their present life and activities. Just last week we heard Jesus tell His audience to invest their "treasure in heaven" rather than on earth. As we look at the remainder of Chapter 12, Jesus is going to give us a clearer picture of exactly what it means to invest our "treasure in heaven." How do we acquire this treasure? How do we invest what we have—our time; money; and abilities—in heaven? How can we know what's important to God and what will build His kingdom rather than our bottom line?

Jesus is going to guide our thinking by explaining a series of choices that, when we make the right choice, will yield heavenly deposits, bearing eternal significance and benefit. The language and illustrations Jesus uses make it clear that He is talking about the choices we can make today! We are living in the time period that extends from His first coming, the time He actually spoke these words, to the time of His return, His second coming, still yet in the future.

Don't you love having choices! Sometimes when my dad would come home from work, he'd have something he wanted to give me. He'd hold out both hands and ask me to pick one. You know how it works. I would get whatever was in the hand I picked. My heart would speed up, I'd feel a little flush with excitement. I knew I was going to get something good. But then it would hit me. One hand has got to have something I want more than the other. What if I choose the wrong hand and get what's second best? But I had to choose...so I did. I had no better than a fifty-fifty chance of getting something I really wanted.

We have a lot of verses to cover, so put on your running shoes because here we go. We'll see the first choice Jesus sets before His disciples and, ultimately, us, in verses 35-40. **"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have**

them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Jesus calls for us to **Choose to stay awake**. To be ready and watching are the key thoughts here. The servants were to be ready and watching for their master's return. They were to be prepared and stay awake, no matter what hour he came. To be ready requires knowing what to do and being sure you have what you need to get it done. You have to think ahead, be proactive, and diligent to see its completion.

When I think about being ready, I think about the story of George, age 92, and Jane, age 89, who were excited about their decision to get married. They went for a walk to discuss wedding plans, and on the way they passed a drug store. The elderly couple went inside and George began to ask the owner several questions. "We're about to get married," George told him. "Do you sell heart medication?" "Of course we do," the owner replied. "How about support-hose to help with poor circulation?" "Definitely." "What about medicine for rheumatism, osteoporosis, and arthritis?" George continued. "All kinds," said the owner with confidence. George asked, "Hearing aids and denture supplies, reading glasses?" "Yes." "What about eye drops, sleeping pills, Geritol, and Ensure?" "Absolutely." "Do you sell wheelchairs too...walkers, and canes?" "All kinds and sizes," the owner replied. "But why all the questions?" George smiled and said, "We've decided to use your drug store for our bridal registry." George and Jane knew how to get ready.

Being dressed ready to serve with a burning lamp is what a servant should do while their master is away. Today Jesus might have said "keep your belts buckled" and "keep fresh batteries in your flashlight." In Jesus' day, outer clothes were long and flowing. If they got in the way and slowed you down or caused you to stumble it could mean disaster for a servant. It could keep them from moving freely and being available to serve their master. And lamps allowed the servant to see what needed to be done, as the day wore on into the darkness and night came. The lamp referred to here was a

refillable oil lamp, requiring the servant to pay attention to how much oil was left in the lamp, ensuring that it would not die out.

And for those who choose to stay awake, there will be a reward. He says it will be “good” for these servants. The word means they are to “receive God’s favor.” Used twice gives added emphasis. And how is that “favor” described? It’s the most amazing thing. There is a reversal of roles. The master dresses himself to serve and waits on the servants.

The second and third watch would put the master’s return in the early hours of dawn, between midnight and 3:00 a.m. in the morning. They were to stay awake, excitedly anticipating their master’s return. C.S. Lewis caught the heart emotion of these servants when he wrote, “The greatest thing is to be found at one’s post...living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years.”

The parable of the thief and the owner of the house in verse 39 serve to reinforce Jesus’ exhortation to stay awake, to resist becoming slack, if the master does not return quickly. In these verses the unexpected arrival of the thief parallels the unexpected arrival of the master in verses 36-38. And likewise the unaware house owner parallels the unready servants in those same verses. If the owner remains awake and vigilant he will not suffer loss. The result of his readiness brings a benefit just as it did for the servants. There is an old saying among Christians, “Do not allow your eyes to sleep or your eyelids to slumber until the hour of your death, but labor without ceasing that you may enjoy life without end.” Good words to remember.

Verse 40 makes it clear that Jesus is talking about His own return, His second coming. We cannot know the day of His return. We can only choose to stay awake until that day comes. We are at 2000 years and counting. Are we awake or napping?

To stay wake requires us to pay attention to and to do the things Jesus commanded. We are to continually grow up in our faith. We are to use our time, money, and abilities to the benefit and encouragement of other believers. And at the very heart of staying awake is the pursuit of an ever-deepening intimate relationship with Him. The word for “servants” used here relates to our relationship with Christ, for it describes one who serves his master with the highest devotion of love. We are to be prepared and bold, even zealous, in our service for Him.

Now, Jesus is going to use a question from Peter to lead us into the second choice He wants us to consider. **“Peter asked, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?’ The Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom**

the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions”” (vv. 41–44).

Peter is stirred and a little concerned about Jesus’ teaching. And he asks Him if this applies to everyone or only to the disciples. As He often does, Jesus answers a question with a counter question, always bringing more insight than just the original question. Elsewhere in scripture, Jesus says, “I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” Here, however, Jesus charges His disciples with a special responsibility, a responsibility that extends to leaders in His church today.

Leaders are to be faithful, which is to be reliable. The wisdom they are to exhibit involves the ability to apply knowledge in order to make practical, prudent, and appropriate decisions, bringing benefit to the body of Christ. The manager who feeds their fellow servants at the appropriate times and in appropriate amounts displays these qualities.

Leaders in the church are to use the resources of that church to care for others. In John chapter 21, after His resurrection, Jesus will remind Peter of this charge, to care for those who are entrusted to him. As Jesus tries to encourage Peter He asks him three questions. And after each of Peter’s responses, He exhorts him to “feed my lambs,” “take care of my sheep,” and “feed my sheep.” So Jesus’ second directive, to create treasure in heaven, is more specifically directed towards leaders in the church who are to **choose to serve others.**

Notice in verse 43 that “it will be good” for those who are found doing this when the master returns. They will receive God’s favor just as the servant in the first part of this passage receives God’s favor for remaining awake. In fact, these managers will receive an even greater honor by being put in charge of even more of the master’s possessions. It reminds us of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:21, **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”**

But what if a leader chooses to be unfaithful and refuses to care for the believers entrusted to him? What if he uses his position for his own advantage? Jesus addresses that possibility in the next few verses. **“But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and 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 is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers”**” (vv. 45–46).

Here we see a manager who takes what has been given to him to care for the church family but, instead, uses it for his own gain. This misuse doesn’t just mean they hoard money or material possessions. It also can include

the exerting of inappropriate influence and control over people for personal gain. In other words, taking advantage of them, claiming a superior position and relationship with God. There are many temptations for those who provide leadership in the church. The Elders and Pastors here at CPC are not naïve to the danger and we need to ask you to join us in prayer that neither pride, greed, nor power ever enter into our thoughts, decisions, or actions.

What happens to a leader in the church who makes the choice to place their own needs ahead of the church family's? Like those servants back in verses 35-40, they will suffer loss. But we need to be careful when we read the words about the master that "He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers." Romans 8 clearly states that, "**there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" And in John 10 Jesus says, "**My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.**" So, whatever Jesus' exact meaning is here, He cannot mean that they will lose their salvation.

Perhaps it is similar to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. Speaking about leaders in the church he says: "**If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.**"

There is no loss of salvation in these verses. As I searched the commentaries to gain some consensus as to the meaning of these words, the only thing they all agreed on was that the unfaithful and unwise manager will suffer loss, at the very least by not receiving the reward that the faithful and wise manager will receive.

Verses 47 and 48 are also hard to understand. "**That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. 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.**"

Two kinds of servants are described here. One knows what his master wants him to do but chooses not to do it. The second doesn't know the master's will and thereby, understandably, doesn't do it either. The first receives "many blows"...the latter "few blows." What we see here are varying degrees of punishment, depending upon the knowledge each had of the master's will.

In the setting of the church, the first person may refer to a false teacher. These are people who assume a position of authority in a body of believers but are not actually believers themselves. The second category may

simply be unbelievers who sin as a result of never having been clearly taught God's will. We can see how the "false teachers" should be punished but why are the unbelievers punished at all...they were never taught God's will.

In both cases there is some level of personal responsibility. Romans 1:20 states, through creation itself, all have some knowledge of God. Therefore, because the second servant should have made it his business to know his master's will, judgment is appropriate. The closing words of verse 48 express the heightened responsibility that goes hand-in-hand with church leadership. No one in church leadership can take lightly the consequences of neglecting or abusing their role.

Now we come to our next opportunity to choose. Jesus tells us that you must **choose your side**. And, as we will see, it is necessary and due to the logical consequences that come from making the first two choices. Let's read verses 49-53. "**I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.**"

The "fire" Jesus refers to is the judgment that will occur when He returns. He wishes it had already happened because that judgment will do away with sin and its power over mankind. It's a judgment on the wicked and results in their separation from the righteous. But something else must happen first. Jesus talks of a "baptism" that He must undergo. It distresses Him because He is talking about what He must endure on the cross in order to secure the forgiveness of our sin. While Jesus does bring salvation in His first coming, His second coming will also bring judgment. Jesus desired that the time of suffering had already past.

For the sensible man, every day should be viewed as a day of reckoning. But it is the nature of sin in man to avoid and refuse to take responsibility for their actions, especially their sin. It seems we will do anything to ease or excuse our sense of guilt and pending judgment.

This need of the unbeliever to deny any sin in their life creates a tension between them and those who accept Jesus' offer of salvation. So, from the time Jesus spoke these words right up to the present moment, those who choose to follow Christ must be prepared for broken relationships with others. These divisions will even occur in our families, the closet of

relationships.

Jesus has made it fairly obvious what the wise choices would be for both the believer, in verses 35-40, and the church leader, verses 41-48. But now He warns us that these wise choices will lead to the need for a third choice. When we make the right choices, we will have to contend with the reaction of others. What about all those people whose choices differ from our choices? What if they feel our choice is wrong and their choice is right...for everyone? What if they see our choice limiting them in a way they refuse to accept? Choices generate reactions and consequences in our relationships. When we make the choices Jesus encourages, we will encounter opposition and divisions.

Speaking to a group in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Supreme Court Justice Scalia said: "God assumed from the beginning that the wise of the world would view Christians as fools...and he has not been disappointed...Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world." We must determine that we will align ourselves with the truth of God's Word and stand with others who are doing the same.

In verses 54-59, Jesus reveals a final and all-important choice we all have to make. We must **choose reconciliation**. **"He said to the crowd: 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, "It's going to rain," and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, "It's going to be hot," and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?'"**

In the news and perhaps even personally, you have just witnessed unprecedented destruction from hurricanes throughout the Gulf of Mexico and especially in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Diane and I were in New Orleans for a wedding three weeks before Hurricane Katrina hit that city. We drove the highway between Pensacola and New Orleans. It was lined with one beautiful stately home after another...literally mile after mile. They're all gone now. Our ability to predict that hurricane from the appearance of the earth and the sky, if you will, was impressive. We all watched, almost in awe, the satellite pictures and detailed accounts.

The crowd that Jesus addressed could do that too. It must have made them feel very smart even to feel a sense of control. Jesus acknowledges their ability to predict the weather by reading the signs in the sky. They knew a cloud in the west blown in from the Mediterranean meant rain. And a wind from the

desert in the east meant they were in store for a warm day.

But Jesus tells the crowd that a spiritual storm is coming their way and that they have refused to honestly and accurately read and understand the signs and miracles He had done before them. These signs and miracles along with His physical presence should have elicited a prediction of a coming storm. The words "interpret this present time" speak to the appearance of Jesus and their need to make the right prediction of what was about to happen and what would be the responsible choice. The word "hypocrites" shows that the "crowd" to whom Jesus was speaking was not wise and able enough to "interpret this present time." **"Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny"** (vv. 57-59).

In these final three verses, Jesus tells the crowd to seek to be reconciled with their adversary, to settle accounts with him before it's too late. He uses the secular illustration of a legal dispute, which everyone, then and now, could relate to and understand. Although there are things to fight for, even to go to battle for in court, Jesus is here, alluding to the need for us to be reconciled with God before the Day of Judgment. In human affairs, as well as with God, it is better to resolve a crisis situation, and avoid any potential loss or penalty.

Each of us must accept God's terms for reconciliation. The signs of the times and the presence of Jesus, call for an immediate response. It's been said, "the church speaks the language of the End, so that all will know how high the stakes are in the present." In these verses, Jesus exhorts the crowd and us to recognize and claim Him as their sole means of reconciliation with God. It's been said that no one can repent too soon because no one knows how soon it may be too late. Jesus wants each of us to choose to be reconciled to God through the sacrifice He made on the cross, rather than attempting to mount a weak defense against God's righteous judgment of our sin.

So where does that leave us? Do you understand the choices Jesus just set before us. If we will follow His directives in these choices, we will be depositing treasure in heaven. Do you know the difference between the choices Jesus asks us to make and the choices my father asked me to make by choosing one of his closed hands? We know which choice is best. Jesus tells us the "good" that will come to those who choose wisely. So what will we do? Will we seek to prepare ourselves for our master's return?

- Will we choose to grow deeper in our relationship with Him? Will we devote ourselves to understanding of His

Word? Will we commit to serve Him by serving others?

- Will we lead in His church, caring for the needs of others and seeking their best? Will we sacrifice our time, money, and abilities?

- Will we choose to stand for our beliefs and with our fellow believers? Will we pay whatever cost to be identified with Him and His people?

- Will we admit to ourselves and to God that Jesus alone is able to deliver us from judgment and reconcile us to God?

Each choice is ours to make. No one can make them for us. We have to choose to be ready for Christ's return. What a great...and "good"...day that will be for those He finds ready and watching. We need to have the same attitude as the little girl who, after leaving a Sunday School lesson on the second coming of Christ, began quizzing her mother: "Mommy, do you believe Jesus will come back?" "Yes." "Could he come this week?" "Yes." "Today?" "Yes." "Could he come in the next hour?" "Yes." "In a few minutes?" "Yes, dear."

The little girl paused and thought for a moment. Then she said, "Mommy...would you comb my hair?"

We need to choose to live with the same excited anticipation this little girl expressed. We need to choose to be ready for Christ's return.

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