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## Preparing for the Future

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TEXT: Luke 12:35-40 (ESV)

"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."

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Do you think much about the future? I think many of us do. It's important to us. Inventor Charles Kettering once remarked on the wisdom of looking ahead. "We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there." Make sense. And the truth is, there's always been a human desire deep within to know something about what lies ahead, so we might be more prepared for it and feel more secure about it. So, we listen closely to those who talk about the future. For instance, presently America is in the midst of national, state, and local political campaigns, which are addressing the future of our country on issues such as energy and economy, ecology, national defense. And they tell us that these are important future concerns that need to be dealt with by competent, trustworthy people. How you vote will impact your future. Those running for office tell us, "If you vote for me, I'll make sure your future is bright and secure. It's the wise thing to do." And the candidate who looks most promising for our future typically will get our vote. And we care about our financial future as well, don't we? We want our personal finances to last, and we wish we had a crystal ball for future markets and investments. So, we turn to investment companies who promise "Go with our firm and we'll work hard to keep you

secure in the future." So we picked the one that looks like they'll look out for us the best. And we have insurance companies who warn us that we'd better make sure our future is well covered in case some personal property disaster or a serious medical issue comes up, and we listen to them and purchase policies that make us feel more secure about the future. And we're fascinated with scientists who speculate about the future and about technology and with predictions about living in the future.

Well, the Bible talks about the future. It tells us of a day when this old world as we know it will come to an end and we will move out of the time age as we know it and into eternity. And Jesus is reminding us that we live on the edge of eternity in today's passage, when he tells his disciples, "The son of man is coming." He is actually referring to himself when he talks of the coming son of man who will come to judge at the end of time. That's why we profess in our Apostle's Creed these words about him: he's coming again to judge the living and the dead. We're reminding ourselves of this important truth about the future. We believe it. Unfortunately, though, we don't spend much time thinking or speaking about this subject in the church or outside the church. A discussion on the subject of the nation's economic futures will get a lot of people's time and attention much more than the topic of eternity.

So, what are the reasons? Probably because today's problems and needs seem more relevant. They're right in our face. And this talk of this pie in the sky emphasis seems to be escapism and it's not as interesting or appealing. We'll get things done. Or we get distracted. We're so focused on the present, we don't consider future spiritual matters like Heaven. And admittedly, we kind of like this life. We don't like to think about the end. It seems mysterious to us and it makes us uneasy. And there's a bit of uneasiness or awkwardness at the delay in Christ reappearing. For many of us, we thought he'd be here by now. Why isn't he?

But in today's passage, Jesus tells his followers and those that are listening in that eternity is an important thing to pay attention to and to be prepared for. The end is coming someday. We've heard that statement even in the field of science, too, haven't we? Many scientists have warned that at the end of the world through nuclear or ecological catastrophes as a strong possibility if we're not careful. But beyond the human voice, the authoritative word of God speaks to us now, saying, "The end of history, as you know it, is coming. It's important for you to be ready for that great day." Of course, people immediately think "when." And the answer is we can't know that

Jesus says he'll come like a thief in the night, unexpectedly. It sounds like we'd best just put away our prophecy charts and *Left Behind* novels and materials that speculate on this question and be content to trust that he is coming again to judge the living and the dead and usher in the new Heaven and new Earth, and commit ourselves to be ready to meet him face to face. Our text speaks specifically about being ready for that day when Jesus returns. Jesus says, "I want you to be like servants waiting for their master to come home from a wedding feast. Blessed are those who the master finds awake when he comes." Jesus is saying there, "I'm coming again someday. And it would be good for you to be ready for me."

Now we also keep in mind that Jesus could well come before the end of the world to receive us individually in death. In this sense, also, we live on the edge of eternity, and our days are short in this in the whole scheme of things that New Testament writer James says, "What's your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." Life is not all that long.

So, what does being ready and dressed for action look like? Two things. First, it means faith. Trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, Lord, because he is the only way to eternity with God. Because of our sinfulness, we can't get there on our own. And there are no answers for this through other religions. It's impossible. We will always fall short. Only Jesus can save us from sin and death. Let me explain: to stand before God, you see, we must be forgiven. That forgiveness comes by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. God has offered us the forgiveness we need through Jesus Christ, his son, who bore our sins in his body on the cross. He paid for our sins. The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Roman Church in chapter 5, "Since therefore we have now been justified by Christ's blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." The gift of forgiveness for our sins is ours when we receive Christ into our lives. Through Him, we have a reconciled, eternal relationship with God. We become children of God. We are assured that our eternal destiny is a sure thing. We, as adopted children of God, will live for eternity with Him in His Heaven. He holds our eternal future, this Jesus Christ, the confident hope that we all are seeking and longing for as we look to the eternal future, is found in Christ alone. It's given to us by grace, through faith in him and what he's done for us at the cross and the grave. Trusting in Jesus, you see, you have a great forever promise to you. So put your faith in him alone first for a life in eternity with God.

And next: being ready also involves faithfulness to Christ. Staying dressed for action is serving him. It's not just standing around in his church and in the world. It's serving him in his church and in this world. We live lives as obedient servants of Christ, waiting for His return, like in the parable. We carry on his business, his mission every day, as if it's our last. Telling others about the saving work he has done for this sinful world. How to find eternal life for themselves through Christ. We were lost. But now we have a savior we can trust for eternal life. We don't keep the good news of Jesus to ourselves, if we're faithful servants. We're always looking for those opportunities to bring him up in our conversations. And we unashamedly stand up and speak up for Jesus and his gospel before others, never turning from him or denying him when we're under pressure from the world. We stand firm on our solid rock. Jesus Christ, that's faithfulness. We also walk in his footsteps, serving and obeying God by loving and serving others as we've been loved by Jesus, the Son of God. And we faithfully invest ourselves and our resources to God's mission to bring all the peoples of the world to a saving faith in Christ. C.s. Lewis sums it up best. He says "The greatest thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years." I have found this analogy from Christopher Eck helpful in explaining faithfulness to Jesus while we wait for his return. He writes,

Imagine a family of four living in a modest home. It's a good home and it meets their needs. But it's also far from perfect. The pipes are aging. The floors are scratched up. The walls have marks on them. The kitchen is dated. Well, one day Grandpa comes to visit them and tells them, "I'm saving money to do a major renovation of your house. In ten years, I'll redo everything for you. New floors, appliances, wiring, and roofing, siding and landscaping. Everything will be redone." Well, that night after Grandpa leaves, the family celebrates and talks about the dream house to come. But they face a dilemma. How do they live now until the new house is ready? With some sarcasm. The oldest son says, "Who cares how we live? It's all going to get redone. So I say, We trash this place and live it up." The daughter says, "We can just live here, but let's spend all our time and energy dreaming about the house to come. And the father says, "Well, I'm not fixing anything else in this house. If it breaks, it'll stay broken. I'm not patching holes. I'm not sanding floors, and I'm not fixing doors. As long as the roof does not collapse, I am not touching a thing." The family's mom listened quietly before saying to them, "Here's the thing, though. It will be wonderful to

get a brand new home. But now, even before it comes, we have to live in this home like we're going to live in the brand new one. If we trash this house, we will just learn how to trash houses. We should dream and plan for the new house, but if we only think about the new home, we will miss the goodness that is still here. And if we don't fix anything, we'll need to live with more things broken than are necessary. Seeing broken things only brings sadness." And she concluded. "So from now on you need to imagine, like we are living in the new house now and live in this house just like we will in our new house."

What I find renewing in this passage, that Jesus has taught today, is that promise of blessedness he gives for servants he finds trusting and serving him when he returns. He says the master will come and they'll be blessed and he will serve them. He'll have them recline at the table and serve them. And when I read that, I can't help but think of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, where Jesus serves us now. It's a foretaste of the great feast to come as he serves us his body and blood and the bread and wine and strengthens us and encourages us with forgiveness while we are waiting for the heavenly banquet which awaits his own. We know it's coming. We know the end is coming. And we will sit at the table with Him. And in Christ will live in that place prepared by Jesus, where there's no more sin or sorrow or suffering or death. It'll be a glorious day. Yeah, we live in a in an imperfect world now with sickness and wars and uncertainties and lawlessness and godlessness and even opposition to Christ's gospel throughout the world. But we do not despair because we know the glorious end of history. Blessedness lies ahead for those who trust and follow Jesus Christ. Jesus has given us a glimpse of the big picture. Coming again. Blessedness.

Studying these words of Jesus reminded me of a devotional by Christian author Gerhard Frost. He writes,

I was a thousand miles from home, a visitor at a morning worship service. This one, I found offered more than the liturgy and hymns and handshakes. The church custodian was leaving after having served well and long, and the congregation was taking the time this morning to honor him. They called him forward, gave him gifts, spoke tributes to him. They talked of how he never rebuffed even the shyest child or how he labored with patience and humor, regardless of the situation. One description of him stays in my memory. They said he never lost sight of the large picture.

And Frost says to us, the reader,

The large picture, Can you see it? God has made room for each of us in a picture which is immense and too profound for time or space to encompass. And what a wonderful vision this is. Our father, through his grace, lets us see beyond our present incompleteness and emptiness to his bountiful fullness that is awaiting his own. He helps us to look further beyond the ache of the present, to the beauty of the endless future with him. That there is a place at the table for each of his children in his Heaven. And that's our large picture.

Friends, keep hanging on to that glorious future picture, trusting in him and serving Jesus until the day He comes to take us to Himself so that we may be with him for eternity. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for the reminder that the future belongs to you and that trusting in your son for salvation, we will spend eternity with you. And so, we join the saints of old and commit ourselves to trusting and serving you in this world and praying each day. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.