

Luke 12:35-48; II Thes. 3:6-15; The Master Returns I. Marks of a Faithful Servant II. Marks of a Foolish Servant III. Marks of the Master's Return

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how are we called to serve within the house of the Lord? What marks or characteristics will define the life of those who are followers of Jesus Christ? Well, today our Lord reveals that we are in fact stewards of God's gifts- servants in God's house- called to be diligent and watchful. As humans, we tend towards the extreme. Either we are so busy with our lives- trying to store up treasures and possessions- that we think little about the life that is to come. This extreme was exposed last week. Today we deal with the other extreme- we are so focussed on heaven and what is to come that neglect our work today! I mean, if we can't take anything with us- if God will provide what I need no matter what I do- why not sit back and enjoy life while I wait for it to be over? Our passage today builds on the concept of the kingdom found back in v. 32. Today we consider the delay and the return of the King! There are similar themes shared with our last Sunday evening service as well- specifically the judgment and reward to come. The fact is- worrying hinders our work- but fear also stands in the way of faithful service. The image today is one of a master or owner of the house who puts the house in the care of servants while He is away. We look at this theme; The master of the house returns to inspect the work of His servants.

I. Marks of a Faithful Servant

We start by considering the marks of a faithful servant. Since we belong to Jesus Christ- since we have been purchased by Him- how shall we live and act? Remember that all we have are- indeed all things have been redeemed or purchased by Christ's precious blood. We belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Belonging to Him- and living as a part of His household- means that He has the right to determine how we should live. How does Jesus want us to live our current lives? Well, as v. 35 opens- we are to be girded for action- dressed and ready for movement and work! The picture is one that goes all the way back to the first Passover- the Israelites ate with their cloaks tucked in their belts so that they could easily move- ready to run and depart the land of slavery. So a Christian is one who is ready for action. As we heard a few weeks back from Heb. 12- lay aside anything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles- and run the race before you with endurance! Also- keep your lamps trimmed- keep your lamps full of

oil and the wick set out at full height! Here we call to mind the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Mt. 25. The wise virgins had lots of light and were ready when the groom came- thus prepared they could enter into the wedding feast! V. 36 continues this idea by saying- be men who waiting and ready. Wait with expectation- fully prepared to ready for action! Be ready at a moment's notice to get going! As Christians we are never off the clock -never fully at ease in this world. Again in v. 36 we are called to be always prepared- so that when the master comes we can open the door and let Him in! Ready to serve the master when He arrives! But also- serving the master while He is still away! This is the idea in v. 42! As a faithful steward we are to be busy with our work- doing our assigned task each day. The servant here is called to give food to those in his trust and care- taking care of his household until the master of the house comes back. Being generous and kind to the fellow members of the household- working as the master has called and doing the tasks which would please the owner of the house. And finally, in v. 37 we read- be stay awake and in v. 40- be ready. As Christians we are called to be ready for Jesus to come back at any time. Maybe today- or next week. Ready at all times means being faithful in the work Christ calls us to do- at all times- because we don't know when He will arrive! Being a faithful steward means using the gifts He has given- the time and opportunities as well as the means He provides- in a way that is pleasing to the Master. Since it was Peter who asked the question in v. 41- it is safe to say that this applies first of all to those called to serve in the household of God! The office bearers are stewards in God's household. Elders and pastors serve as shepherds that must feed and disciple the flock- giving to the members of the household what they need in each season- giving them the means of grace that Christ has placed in our hands. And the deacons as stewards of the ministry of mercy- calling and showing us how to be generous and kind in how we use our abilities and monies within Christ's household. But in another sense, we are all servants in God's house. We all have gifts and opportunities to serve! So although we are all eagerly expecting Christ to come back, we are also diligent to use our time on the earth to work each day as our master has called us! We are always ready for and engaged in action! We are no surprised when the Lord calls us to do something- because we are servants in His house after all! Neither are we surprised when we are called to give and sacrifice what we have- because we are stewards are we not? Yes- Jesus is coming back again as we saw last week. But we need to be ready!

His coming back does not mean that we just stand around looking up into the sky like the disciples did when Jesus ascended- no- we are called to be busy with work until He returns! We are called to faithful work- not idle speculation!

II. Marks of a Foolish Servant

This idle speculation is seen in the marks of the foolish servant. Basically as an opposite of what we saw in our first point- so we can be brief. We are not to be idle, not found sleeping, we are not to be so bound up with cares or overburdened that we cannot or will not move and work! Neither are we to be lazy- forcing other to do what we are called to and can do ourselves! We must also not be selfish- keeping back good from those to whom it is due! We do not see God's gifts as my possessions but as His possessions which are to use and share as stewards. We do not spend our days in idle speculation- thinking that the master will not come today. As v. 45 says- the master is gone and he is not coming back- he is delayed so I can act anyway I want! Idleness in the church is a symptom of a wrong view of the future and our calling today! One of the examples of idleness within the early church can be found in the Thessalonian church. As we read from II Thes. 3- it is evident that the early church was so consumed with the impending return of Jesus Christ that many simply gave up their work and stood around waiting! They were idle- refusing to work seeing labor as a distraction from the spiritual kingdom which was at hand. However, Christ rebukes them by saying- get to work! I am calling you to be wise stewards- not to let the gifts I have given you sit idle! Work hard and so you can give to those in need! Work quietly and earn your own living- don't grow tired of doing well- be faithful with the talents I have given you as my servant! But this idle speculation could also lead to an abuse within the church of Christ! When we see the means Christ gave as our own- when we see people as means to an end who should be serving us- we begin to mistreat and abuse the gifts Christ has given! The Christian life today is not one of ease- the church militant is one of service, sacrifice and obedience! As II Tim. 2 says, the hardworking farmer is the one who can share in the crop! The promise of God's provision for us- as we learned last week- does not mean that we can just sit around with our hands open! No- we must be faithful stewards who are ready, busy and active so that when Christ returns, He will see us working within His household!

III. Marks of the Master's Return

Now that we know the marks of the wise and foolish servant, we come to the marks of the master's return. Not only do we find how we ought to be acting while Jesus is away- we also find out attributes of His return. First of all, we find that His return is certain. As v. 36 says- when- not if- when He returns. It is a certain event. Also, it is unknown. The timing will be unexpected- or when we least expect it. Like the coming of a thief in the night v. 39 says. The third thing we find out about Christ's return is that He is coming back to Judge- to give to each according to what they deserve. His coming will be to bless those who have been faithful in v. 43- setting this servant over much. Having been faithful in little he will be entrusted with much! His 10 talents transitioned into 10 cities as Luke 19 puts it. Well done, good and faithful servant! He will bless these and reward richly those who watched and obeyed. But for the foolish one, these the Master will condemn as v. 47 says. They will receive a severe beating- being cut in two they will lose everything. Even the little they had will be taken away. Those who were selfish and used God's gifts on themselves will have everything of worth stripped away as they are cast out. Each will be held accountable for what they had and what they did. Much required of those who had much. To apply this, congregation, we have been given much. Much not only in the way of great financial blessings- but much by way of Spiritual blessings and a godly inheritance. We have such freedoms and privileges in this world- We each have multiple Bibles- ease of access to come to church. We a godly theme of faithful teaching over the years- many of us have belonged to faithful church and been raised by godly parents. Truly we have much! But to whom much has been entrusted, much is required! Are we putting these many spiritual gifts to work- earning an increase with them- or are we letting them rot by our ignoring them? Christ have given us much- much has been entrusted to us! Let us all show ourselves faithful stewards by using whatever gifts we have to gain an increase for Christ our master!

To conclude, today we find a reminder that the master of the house is going to return- He will come back soon to inspect the work of His servants. Have we been faithful while the master was away? How we use temporary, earthly possession has eternal, heavenly consequences. So let us all be ready, prepared and active- so that when He comes we might all be found faithful!