



“Kingdom Readiness”  
 Luke 12:35-48

**Idea:** Readiness for Christ’s return is the antidote to greed and worry.

**Intro:** In the Northeastern United States, codfish are not only delightful, but they are also a big commercial business. There is a market for eastern cod all over, especially in sections farthest removed from the northeast coastline. Years ago, however, the public demand created a problem for the shippers. At first, they froze the cod, then shipped them elsewhere, but the freeze took away much of the flavor. So, they experimented with shipping the fish alive, in tanks of seawater, but that proved even worse. Not only was it more expensive, but the cod still lost its flavor. In addition, the fillets became soft and mushy.

Finally, some creative soul solved the problem in a most innovative manner. The codfish were placed in the tank along with their natural enemy – the catfish. From the time the cod left the East Coast until it arrived in its westernmost destination, those ornery catfish chased the cod all over the tank! And as you might guess, when the cod arrived at the market, they were as fresh as when they were first caught. There was no loss of flavor nor was the texture affected. If anything, it was better than before.

Today, some of you feel like one of those codfish being chased around the tank by a bunch of catfish. Life is on your tail. The cares and concerns that come from the pursuit of material and worldly things weigh heavy upon you. They create fear and anxiety in your life. This is not how our Lord would have His children to live. Jesus said, *“Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing”* (Luke 12:22-23). He calls us to change our perspective and to set our sight much higher.

Unfortunately, we tend to settle for lesser things. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are to treasure the King and His Kingdom far and above everything else. After all, what we treasure is where our hearts will be (Luke 12:34). When we fail to invest in what is eternal, we reap that which is temporal and worrisome. Haddon W. Robinson wisely said, “What worries you masters you.” In other words, worry is the emotional reward of material preoccupation. When we treasure Christ, however, we have no reason to worry. We know He will take care of our every need.

Lest we think that treasuring Christ will remove all our problems and dangers, Jesus has clearly told us that in this world we will experience tribulation (John 16:33). Like the codfish in the tank, we will have our fair share of catfish chasing us. The difference is that we have Jesus, who has overcome the world, on our side. He does not remove hardships from our lives. Instead, He walks with us through them, while promising to return one day. When Jesus returns His Kingdom will be fully established, bringing an end to all evil, pain, and suffering. From today till that day, we are to be ready for His return. In the verses before us today, I want to talk with you

about Kingdom readiness. We see a call to keep our eyes open for His return, but we also see that readiness for Christ's return is the antidote to greed and worry.

Read Luke 12:35-48.

**Inquiry:** In Luke 12, we find five warnings. Four of them are directed toward God's people. The fifth warning is aimed at those in need of redemption. So far, we have been warned of the dangers of hypocrisy and covetousness. In our passage today, we discover the third warning, which is carelessness. Jesus shifted the emphasis from being worried about the present to being watchful about the future. The themes of this chapter all work together. You see, one of the best ways to conquer hypocrisy, covetousness, and worry is to look for the Lord's return. When you are living in the future tense, it is difficult for the things of the world to ensnare you. In this section, Jesus calls us to Kingdom readiness. There are three things we need to see.

### **Characteristics of Kingdom Readiness**

“Ever since the first days of the Christian church, evangelicals have been looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ. They may have disagreed as to its timing and to the events on the eschatological calendar. They have differed as to a pre-tribulation or post-tribulation rapture – the pre- or post- or non-millennial coming. They may have been divided as to a literal rebirth of Israel. However, all are agreed that the final solution to the problems of this world is in the hands of the King of Kings who will someday make the kingdoms of this world His very own.”

– Arnold T. Olson

The reason there is such strong agreement regarding the return of Jesus Christ is due to the overwhelming evidence of Scripture. The eschaton is mentioned no less than 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. That is, Christ's return is mentioned once for every twenty-five verses. The only books in the New Testament that do not mention the second coming are Galatians and the two short epistles of 2 and 3 John.

The Scriptures shout that Jesus is returning. The Apostle Peter called this “*a living hope*” (1 Pet 1:3). The Apostle Paul referred to it as “*our blessed hope*” (Titus 2:13). At this point in Luke's Gospel, we find the first extended teachings on the second coming of Jesus. Here the Lord warns His followers to be ready. There are two characteristics of readiness.

#### 1) Engagement in the King's Work.

*“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning.”* – Luke 12:35

Jesus uses the image of a Hebrew wedding to portray Kingdom readiness. A wedding celebration in that culture could last several days. Therefore, servants were unsure when their lord would return home. Jesus calls His followers to remain engaged in His work.

The literal Greek rendering of “*stay dressed for action...*” is “let your loins stay girded (ἑστῶσαν ὑμῶν αἱ ὀσφύες περιεζωσμένα). This phrase does not translate well into our culture. A. T. Robertson reminds us that the long garments worn by those during this era made speed difficult. Therefore, it was important to use a girdle to hold the garments up to move quickly. Thus, the ESV rightly translates it in a way that makes sense to us. One of the great characteristics of Kingdom readiness is engagement in the King's work. We must remain dressed for action and keep our lamp's burning so that we might see as we work, which expresses a second characteristic.

#### 2) Expectant of the King's Return.

Verse 36 presents a lovely scene as the returning lord is greeted by faithful servants who were awaiting his return. There is a determined expectation here. The servants remained awake, alert, and engaged

because they were expectant. Rather than giving into fatigue and the attitudes that come with being tired, they kept a bright house and bare legs so they could spring up to give their lord a joyous reception.

This is how Jesus' followers are to wait for Him. It is not to be a passive, lethargic wait but one filled with active service, continual preparation, and joyous anticipation. Our Lord calls us to the readiness in Matthew 24:14. He says, *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* The characteristics of Kingdom readiness involve engagement in the work and an expectation of the King's return. It is a beautiful scene that brings the Lord's blessing.

## **Blessings of Kingdom Readiness**

The parable Jesus tells takes an unexpected twist in verse 37. It makes sense to us that the lord of the house is welcomed and served by his servants. Therefore, we can easily understand and get behind the call to engage in the work and expect the return. What is difficult to comprehend are the actions of the lord in this parable. He was so moved by the faithfulness of the servants that he sought to bless them. We see two aspects to this blessing.

### 1) Served by the King.

Rather than sitting down at the table to be served a meal after his long journey, this lord dresses himself to wait on the servants. Luke uses the same Greek word in verse 37 to describe this action as he did in verse 35 for the servants. This lord made his servants recline around the table, and he served them! Can you see the joy portrayed in this late-night feast? There in that well-lit house a girded, bare-legged master was setting dishes before his servants and refilling their cups as happy – even uproarious – conversation floated throughout the room.

I believe this is a very difficult image for us to grasp. Part of our failure to comprehend comes from our understanding that Jesus is indeed our King. How in the world or why in the world would the King every serve the help? Perhaps, the greater failure to comprehend on our part is due to our pride. This pride is cloaked with a false humility. We present ourselves as being submissive to and in need of God, but in reality, we want nothing to do with His help. Instead, we really want to be our own help. Several months after Jesus told this parable, in the upper room there in Jerusalem, Jesus stripped Himself down and wrapped a towel about His waist and washed the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17). Peter initially refused Jesus' offer, but after the Lord made it clear that if he were not served by Him, then he would have no share of Him, Peter humbly accepted His service.

Jesus serves us in salvation. We cannot be saved unless we allow King Jesus to wash us clean from our sin. Jesus will serve us again around the marriage supper of the Lamb. On that day, people will come from east and west and from north and south to gather around that glorious table and be served by the King (Luke 13:29). There is a second aspect to His blessing.

### 2) Rewarded by the King.

In verses 42-44, Jesus explains that He will reward those who are ready, faithful, and wise. What will this reward be? The easiest way to explain it is to say, "the servant of Christ who has been faithful in his or her temporary earthly responsibilities will at Christ's return be given vast permanent authority in eternity (Luke 19:15-17).

There are clear characteristics of the Kingdom, which will be blessed by God. We also discover some clear warnings in regard to the Kingdom.

## **Warnings about Kingdom Readiness**

We all have the propensity to be forgetful. There is a natural tendency in all of us to drift in our awareness and commitment to the Lord. Luke presents this first, extensive teaching on Christ's return to curb our tendency to drift. He offers two warnings about Kingdom readiness.

1) The King's return will be a surprise.

This surprise is expressed in verses 39-40 and again in verse 46. Jesus' purpose here is to call believers to readiness. He understands that readiness brings about progress, expansion, and enrichment. On the other hand, when a servant no longer believes the master will return, his or her life will begin to deteriorate and weaken.

How long has it been since Jesus ascended to the Father and told us He was coming back? It has been about 2,000 years. That is a long time! How long have you known the Lord? How long have you been waiting for Him to return? Do you still with the same vigor expect the King's return today as you did shortly after being saved?

Jesus makes it clear that His return will be a surprise. Therefore, we should remain alert and ready so that we might be found to be pleasing and faithful when He does return.

2) The King's return will bring judgment.

Read Luke 12:46-48.

Justice will be served. It will be severe, but it will be fair. Equitable is a term that people love to use these days. When Jesus returns and ushers in His Kingdom, He will rightly judge all people. Those who possessed a greater knowledge of God but rejected His lordship will suffer a greater penalty than those who out of ignorance rejected Him. Both, however, will receive His just judgment against their sin.

Today, we must allow God's Word to remind ourselves that the King is indeed returning. His appearance will be a surprise, meaning we know not when it will take place. Yet, we are sure He will return. We also must allow the Bible to remind ourselves of coming judgment. Therefore, we dare not grow weary in our waiting, but instead let's strive to be ready that we might be blessed.

**Conclusion:** As a follower of Jesus Christ who desires to walk holy and faithfully before the Lord, you will experience your fair share of hardships. Jesus said, *"In the world you will have tribulation"* (John 16:33). Humanly speaking, we wish life could be different and easier, but it cannot because this world is set against God and His Kingdom. It is set against you as a member of His Kingdom. The hardships, while difficult and dangerous, actually work for your benefit. They keep you spiritually fit and vibrant. Like those codfish being chased around the tank on the way to the market, the tribulation you experience while waiting for Christ's return adds flavor and gospel texture to your Christian life. They strengthen your spiritual muscles, deepen your Kingdom resolve, and expand your Kingdom engagement. The Kingdom readiness that is produced in your life helps you fight against greed and worry because your eyes are fixed on the King. You are living for someone and something far greater than anything this world can offer or threaten.

If you have not yet trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior, may these verses open your eyes to the reality of His kingship and return. May you see the promise of blessings to those who would repent of sin and turn to Him in faith, and may you also see the promise of judgment for rejecting His free and gracious offer. Jesus will return one day. Are you ready for the King's return?