



### **The Parable of Watchful Servants**

**As Jesus finishes the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12, he then goes on to teach about God's provision: "Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes" (12:22). He then reminds His disciples of how God clothes the grass and feeds the birds, and that worry over such matters will not "add a single hour" to their lives. He lovingly enjoins them to "seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you."**

**He then says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (12:32-4).**

**The young man wanting to have Jesus settle a dispute over his inheritance, the Pharisees whose hearts had been captured by the world, and the disciples, who are learning from Jesus just how challenging the future will be and yet how God will provide for them,**

now hear this parable of the watchful servants. The question here is, where is your heart?

The crowds that follow Jesus are starving for some spiritual morsels: their hearts are searching for some revelation of Who God really is. Some in the crowd are no doubt curious to see what Jesus was all about: their hearts for searching for some novelty, a distraction from the boredom of everyday life.

The young man is looking for justice: his heart longs for the security that the inheritance money will provide him. His heart is also scarred by distrust--obviously he asks Jesus for help because he really didn't trust his own brother to settle accounts fairly.

The disciples' hearts are calmed by Jesus emphasizing His Father's superintendence of His creation: He provides food for the birds who are far less valuable to Him than His own children. Jesus wants their hearts to be set on higher things, not beset by worry over the workings of everyday life. A heart can be so burdened that God's voice is silenced.

The Pharisees' hearts are so imbued with pride that it is all about them. God's voice has been silenced by the sin of pride, of self-sufficiency and of desiring the approval of men. Not just any men: the crowds were useless sinners who needed to get right with God, and the Pharisees, of course, would determine just what that "right" meant. The Pharisees' hearts craved approval from each other and the powerful ruling elites in their own circle and with the Romans.

Why all of this emphasis on the heart? What we love, we worship--plain and simple. What we worship leads to a view of the world that we will then act upon. If we are afraid, we will shrink from God's call. If we are prideful, we will avoid God's direction and go our own way. If our hearts are scarred, we will distrust others and only rely on ourselves. If we are hungry, we will sometimes settle for less than what God offers. So? The days are short, and time here on Earth is immensely valuable.

So Jesus launches into His next parable: "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants 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. Truly I tell you, 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 middle of the night or toward daybreak. 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" (Luke 12:35-40).

We must take care of our hearts, because He is depending on us to be ready. If we are distracted in any way, we may miss the signs and be caught unaware. Is this just applicable to His return? I think not. I think that He wants us to be ready for divine encounters--a person comes to us needing advice, a prayer needs to go before the Father now, we must act quickly and with discernment in a crisis. If our hearts are out of contact with His heart, we may lose opportunities to serve in His name. If the voice of God is quieted or even silenced by worry, arrogance, or distraction, a moment where His light could break through might be lost. Not forever--God is too persistent with us to only reach out once--but our choices could delay some needed healing.

We must keep our lamps burning, awaiting of the knock of our beloved Master. Be watchful and when He comes, we participate in His work as if we were His friends! Look at the reversal of roles: the master dresses himself (his servants are now his friends, so they won't be dressing him!) and they join him at the banquet as guests! He waits on them! Jesus is saying, *Look, partner with Me, and lovingly look to do the work of My Kingdom until the day I return. Don't do the work out of duty and obligation, or fear or worry, but out of love for Me! Let your heart be so in love with Me that you long for My return and yet stay busy, with a heart always on the lookout to serve Me!*

It is startling how Jesus jumps from a master/servant idea to a thief breaking in. Why does Jesus change the comparison from master and servants, who have a close bond, to a homeowner who will not let a thief he knows is coming to break into his house? Jesus says in Revelation 16:15, "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed." In Thessalonians 5:2, it says, "For you

**yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."**

**A master returning seems almost inviting as a comparison; he may be angry if his servants are not ready, but a thief ups the ante. The thief takes away the master's possessions, and the servants can't just go out and replace them for the master. The thief takes away when he comes to a house. So, Jesus is showing two sides of one coin: He will come for His own, and seat them at the table as friends and partners in the work of His Father. We like that. But a thief jump starts us to readiness--we need to be always ready, ever watchful and dutiful to what He has called us to do.**

**Jesus is both Lamb and Lion, Master and Thief. He wants us to dine with Him, but He also wants us to be vigilant: "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." We wait not in fear of the Thief, but in holy expectation of His glorious snatching away of His people.**

**In the meantime? Serve. Love. Worship. Pray. We've got a lot to do, you and I.**