

**Parable of the Alert Slave
Pastor John E. Dubler
Luke 12: 35-48**



“Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps lit.” Luke 12:35

Here is one of three parables which address the necessity of being watchful and alert for the Lord’s return: The Parable of Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Fig Tree and this one, The Alert Slaves. The fundamental lesson of the parable is this: we cannot know the exact time the Lord will return. Secondly we learn that we must be ready and engaged in serving while we wait. And finally, a tertiary, but very important lesson from the parable is this: any leader who misuses his trust as a leader and takes advantage of the flock of our Great Shepherd will be severely dealt with.

Of Servants and Thieves

Two images are employed in this parable: servants and thieves. The role of servant is used to portray one who is faithfully waiting for his master’s return from a wedding banquet. But the parable also employs a second image, that of a thief. No caring householder would allow his house to be broken into if he had known when the thief was coming. In both cases the commendable actions on the part of those involved are watchfulness and service.

Watchful and good hearted servants vs. abusive servants

Among the servant figures employed in this parable we find the one who is watchful, operating with a good heart and clear motives. A second kind of servant is also presented, one who has concluded that the return of his master will be delayed. This servant is abusive and possessed of evil motives.

Luke 12:35-48

Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. 36 Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. 38 Whether he comes

in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

39 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 40 You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

41 Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?" 42 And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 44 Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; 46 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. ¹

Be dressed in readiness with your lamp lit



Photo by Gavin Finley, MD as it appears in his article, "The End-Time Revival," endtimepilgrim.org

The Parable of the Alert Slaves begins with the admonition "Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps lit . . ." To be dressed in readiness (v.35) meant that the servant had secured his loose outer robe under his belt in preparation for whatever might come. The King James Version refers to this action as "girding up the loins." Such preparation allowed freedom of movement for either works of service, fighting or fleeing. The idea is conveyed metaphorically in reference to preparing the mind. For example, in 1 Peter when the apostle writes, "Therefore gird up the loins of your mind . . ." ² he is referring to mental acuity and preparation of mental attitude.

Having lamps lit is familiar to us from the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Those with lamps "going out" are not ready for Jesus' return. Therefore those ready for the return of the Lord will be like slaves ready for action with lamps alight.

¹ All scripture references are to the New American Standard Updated Version unless otherwise noted.

² 1 Peter 1:13 New King James Version

Jesus uses the emphatic “truly I say to you,” or “Amen, I say to you,” and gives the reader a sense of the importance of what follows . . . namely a role reversal. The master, having found the servants on the alert for his return, now girds himself to serve.

Jesus the servant

I have meditated some moments on what this particular part of the parable might mean. How can it be that Jesus will return and serve us? It is the same reaction Peter had during the Last Supper. “Never shall You wash my feet,” he proudly declared.³ But Jesus answered, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” That certainly settled the issue for Peter as he then asked the Lord to wash not only his feet but also his hands and his head.



We should not be surprised that when Jesus comes back, He will gird Himself and serve His faithful servants who have been waiting for Him even in the last two of the three night watches. Those watchful and alert slaves will indeed be blessed. After all, Jesus has already told us as motivation to serve each other, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”⁴

The thief at midnight

The parable now changes images from servants to thieves. The fact that we do not know the time of Jesus’ return is now emphasized by our Lord in His use of the image of the thief. If we knew a thief was coming we would not allow our house to be broken into. The Son of Man is not like a thief, but the hour of His arrival will be at a time we do not expect, just like a thief, for as we are told, “the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.”

In Jesus’ Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24) the same figure of a thief is used to get us to think seriously about the fact that the exact time of Jesus’ return will remain a mystery until it happens. Jesus is not comparing Himself to a thief, but the time of His return will be very unexpected, just like a thief’s actions in breaking into a house are unexpected. “For this reason,” the Lord tells us, “you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.”⁵

Continual readiness, preparation, and alertness are the answer to being ready for a thief. The same attitudes are required for being ready for the Lord’s return. We can expect Him to return at any time—especially if we do not expect He will.

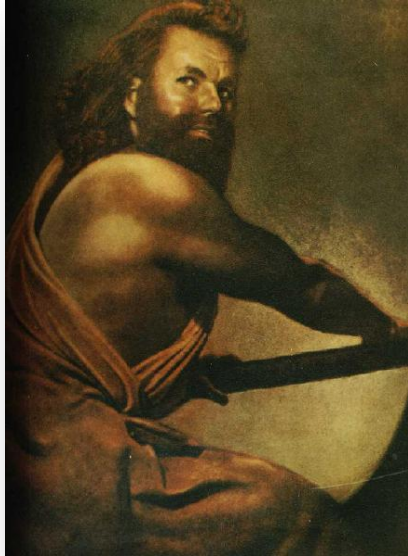
Peter asks for clarification

³ John 13:8-9

⁴ Mark 10:45

⁵ Matthew 24:44

The apostle Peter, dean of the apostles and their spokesman (except in very sensitive situations when Peter would ask John to approach Jesus), asks the Lord if the parable has universal applicability. “Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?” If it is addressed to everyone in general, then it has no special applicability to the apostles, except that they must also be prepared and ready for an “anytime” arrival. However, if the parable is aimed specifically at the apostles, then the level of responsibility becomes more focused.



Jesus’ response to Peter’s question is fairly typical. He asks a question in return. The answer does not focus 100 percent of the responsibility for being alert and watchful on the apostles. However, in what follows, Jesus makes it clear that leaders in the church have special responsibilities during the time before He returns.

The necessity to be alert and watchful is for us all. This fact can be verified by other parables and direct statements of our Lord where no question of limited responsibility is to be considered. Therefore no one is absolved of the responsibility of being watchful, alert and prepared for His return.

However, Jesus’ response to Peter’s question shows us that leaders over Jesus’ flock are expected by the Lord to be careful in their conduct. No leader can carelessly ravage the flock and abuse the sheep of His hand without expecting severe repercussions from the Lord at His return.

Leaders are cautioned elsewhere in scripture about “lording it over the flock.” Take note of two passages in particular:

Acts 20:29-31

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

1 Peter 5:1-4

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your

charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Leaders who act presumptuously given greater punishment

And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few.

If any leader mistreats His sheep, but not as a matter of flagrantly flaunting what he knew what was right, that leader will receive a lighter punishment than one who acts out of willful pride. Any leader who abuses or neglects sheep with high-handed malice, however, will receive greater punishment.

Finally, the parable emphasizes the point of responsibility by concluding: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more."

