

August 7, 2022

*“An Unexpected Hour”*

by Rob Jones

**READING** – Luke 12:32-40

<sup>32</sup>“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup>Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. <sup>35</sup>“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; <sup>36</sup>be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup>Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup>If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. <sup>39</sup>“But know 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. <sup>40</sup>You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

It's interesting when a lectionary passage comes up that causes me to go into a rabbit hole so deep that I pull out not only a *Greek Lexicon* and *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* but also *The Book of Confessions* and several commentaries. This teaching of Jesus is not only important to the crowd he is teaching and to us today, but it has been a point of theology to the church during monumental moments in history.

In today's passage, Jesus is teaching the massive crowds that have begun to follow him. He is pointing out the importance of staying focused on God. To understand his teaching demeanor, one needs to know what has happened in the gospel so far. Jesus had recently been to the house of a Pharisee for dinner. While at dinner, Jesus got into a theological debate. (that's an excellent way of saying argument) After the heated discussion, the Scribes and Pharisees began aggressively attacking Jesus publicly, and he began to speak about their hypocrisy and wealth.

This teaching is in three parts, but they all say the same thing; **Be Prepared**. Jesus starts with a familiar theme of wealth. He tells the crowd to “sell their possessions and give alms.” Alms are donations given to the poor and needy. They should build a treasure in heaven, where thieves cannot reach it and moths cannot destroy it. Much like last week's parable, this teaching is less about how wealthy the people are; it's more about what distracts us from God in this world. You see, these are not rich people following him around. But they, too, are preoccupied with worldly things.

The second part is a call to action. Jesus uses the metaphor of enslaved people waiting for their master to come home from his wedding. He tells them that if they are diligent and observant, they will be served by the master. This is counter-instinctual from how the slave/master or servant/master role is traditionally understood. Jesus will revisit this theme during the last supper when he says, “[For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.](#)” (LUKE 22:27)

The third part ties into the second part. Jesus implies that he will be the one who comes unannounced like a thief in the middle of the night. So, they are to remain watchful, ready for action at a moment's notice.

The language is interesting. Jesus says, “Be dressed for action.” In Greek, he uses a word that translates to “gird.” This word has several intentions in both Greek and Hebrew. The standard inference has to do with war. The act of girding oneself is to be ready to fight or flee at a moment's notice. This is the same language God told Moses to use when instructing the Israelites to be prepared to leave Egypt at

the first Passover. I believe this language is supposed to remind the crowds of the Exodus story and thereby infer the importance of this message. Be prepared.

The basic message of all three parts is that we are not to take our attention off God. We are to scan the horizon for the coming Lord constantly. Because we never know when the time will be. The distractions of this world can do just that. We can become so distracted that we forget to focus on God. Things we prioritize in this life overtake the treasures we should be worried about in heaven.

Unlike the attentive servants, we often become complacent, skimming the horizon to see if there is anything out there. We slowly begin to rely on other things to remind us of God. TV, Radio, and even political leaders claim to have our beliefs at the forefront of their agenda. We slowly forget the fundamentals of our faith; to focus on God by taking care of the poor, widowed, and orphaned.

No matter your stance on national politics, one might find that many have slipped into this behavior today. However, I am not one for preaching any political agenda from the pulpit. That's not my job; my job is to preach about God. However, I want to relay some history to you this morning concerning this passage.

In the early 1930s, the nation of Germany was reeling from economic disaster. After losing the first world war, the rest of the world pretty much placed the bill for that war on the backs of the German people. In January of 1933, Adolf Hitler was named chancellor of Germany by playing on people's fears of communism. After coming to power, he told the people he would be their savior. He consolidated power, taking control of the government, outlawing every political party but the Nazi party, making the press the enemy of the state, and finally nationalizing the church. Soon, to be a Christian was to be patriotic, and to be patriotic was to be a Nazi. It happened so fast that most Germans just went along with it. The state-controlled media (No left or right) was an echo chamber for the government, and so was the pulpit.

In May 1934, not even a year and a half later (Yes, it happened that fast), The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church met. This group of Ministers and Theologians came together and wrote "The Theological Declaration of Barmen." This declaration spoke out against the actions of the Nazi government and, more importantly, the national church for its role in what was happening. This declaration found its way into our PC(USA) Book of Confessions. If you haven't read it, or it's been a while, I recommend revisiting it. It is eerie how close to home some of the wording can get to things I see on social media, in news outlets, and everyday conversations today. I think Martin Niemoller, one of the leading proponents of writing the Barmen Declaration, puts it into the best perspective.

*Poem: First they came...*

*"First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a socialist.*

*Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a trade unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—  
Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”*

- *Martin Niemoller*

Most Germans took the union of Christianity, nationalism, and militarism for granted, and patriotic sentiments were equated with Christian truth. All this happened in less than a year and a half after Hitler's election. The Nazi government was poised to invade Poland in another five, and WWII began. The Germans were brainwashed into thinking that Hitler's will was the same as God's. Somehow, somehow, the German people took their collective eye off God. They stopped looking at the horizon and started looking for someone to tell them their beliefs.

Jesus pulls no punches with this teaching. He is going to come like a thief in the night. For those who are ready, things will be like being served as the master. For those who are not, well, what does a thief leave in their wake? **Destruction and ruin.** Has anyone ever seen pictures of the aftermath of WWII in Germany? I'd say that's a pretty good description.

Christianity is not an easy religion. It is not one nice guy standing in front of other nice people saying it will be all right. It is one sinner standing in front of other sinners saying what needs to be said, not only for your sake but for my sake as well.

We must remind ourselves and each other to remain dressed for action. Stay focused on God. Take care of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and each other. Our teachings and our applications of Christianity should only come from the Word of God, Jesus. And our best witness to the Word of God is the bible. We should spend our time studying that witness and in prayerful discernment after studying it. We should never let someone's interpretation of it be the gospel. Especially when they say they have our best interest in mind. Because we should all have God's interest in mind.

The entire point of the protestant reformation was the idea that we should seek the will of God for ourselves, not allow the church to dictate it to us. So be vigilant, dress for action, and remain watchful with your lamps lit. Because our lord is coming back, and like a thief in the night, we will not know when.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, you are a teacher, counselor, and judge. When you walked among us, you taught a truth that rings through the years, and yet we continue to only listen to ourselves. We pray that this lesson sticks with us, that we remain dressed for action, ready to receive you when you come. Lord, we pray that this world will be reconciled with your will and that the events of 1930s Germany never repeat themselves because we never stop focusing on you. In the name of Christ Jesus, we pray, AMEN!