

The Test of His Purposeful Delay

(Luke 12.35-48)

There is a video of an Orthodox Rabbi (Orthodox Jews don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah—Christ) challenging an American Pastor in Jerusalem: "Ask me to do a miracle, any miracle, as big as you want, ask me and I will do it." The Pastor looked at the Mount, saw the Islamic Mosque behind the Western Wall, and, echoing the words of Jesus, said, "Destroy this temple and build one new in 3 days." The Rabbi mockingly replied: "I will die and go away. When I come back, I will do that which you said."

That is a mockery of the Christian hope. But what if the greater danger is not that the unbeliever mocks His return—that's expected, unfortunately—but that those who claim to believe it begin living as though He will not return?

We believe (!) in this; with all our hearts, we believe it will happen realistically and physically. Every eye will see, every knee will bow down, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is the Lord.

Thesis: Therefore, the way we live should reflect such a belief. It is not restricted to our intellectual acknowledgment, but this belief governs the way we live. His purposeful delay and our waiting are just a test that reveals whether we truly believe Him or not.

1. Background — What Would Jesus' Hearers Have Understood?

"Wedding banquet, household servants, lamps, nighttime watches, master returning."

Before we understand what this parable means to us today, we need first to understand what it meant to the disciples in their days. This story has many foreign cultural concepts to us.

The scene depicts the Master, who went to a wedding feast and will surely return home, though no one knows exactly the day or the hour. His servants are commanded to keep working diligently—just as if He were present.

A) The servant had to be "dressed ready with the burning lamps." In those days, the lamp wasn't an easy switch, but its light, produced by fire, was dependent on the oil poured into it. Thus, to keep your lamp lit during the overnight shift is not a passive switching of the light, but it demands active awareness and work from the servant.

B) The weddings of our days last a few hours; the Jewish weddings of Jesus' days lasted a few days. Here is where the timeline plays an important role in the story. Is the master returning on the very first day, *too soon*, or on the last day, *too late*, or even in the middle of the celebration? The servants don't know, but they must remain ready and vigilant.

Every person in the history of the church who “prophesied” the actual day of Jesus' return, has failed. No one knows when Jesus' Second Coming will be, but we may rest assured that He is coming.

C) Nighttime watches: Purposefully, Jesus mentions that the Master's return might be during the second or third night watch, not the first nor the last (the beginning or end of the shift, respectively).

At the beginning of the shift, it's easy for the worker to “pretend” he is paying attention to his work—the boss just gave instructions to the team, and he may still be “around the corner.” The end of the shift is also an easy time for them to “pretend” they are working—that's when the shift rotates and the Master comes in to check on his workers. It is during the hard times of the shift, during the times when oversight is diminished and the element of trust plays a bigger role, that Jesus mentions that the servant should remain faithful.

D) The Master's return is like the arrival of a thief—no one knows when it will happen. The imagery is clear and self-explanatory; however, it's important that I make the clarification that Jesus is not morally equating himself with a robber. He is only saying that his holy return will catch many by surprise, just like a robber catches people off guard.

Jesus' command is clear: Be on your guard, so that his Second Coming may feel like a good surprise, not a bad one.

2. The Two Servants — What Does Readiness Actually Look Like?

The faithful servant is working faithfully while the unfaithful servant says, “My master is delaying his coming.”

Faithful Servant:	Unfaithful Servant:
Remains vigilant	Becomes careless
Keeps working	Becomes abusive
Waits for the Master	Doubts the Master
Master finds him ready	Master finds him off-guard
Master bestows blessings to him	Master punishes him

The very *same* information, completely *different* actions! The faithful heart says: “My master is delaying; let me keep working just as if he were present right now—I am loyal to him.” The unfaithful heart says: “My master is delaying; I can do whatever I want; he is absent anyway—I am only loyal when he is around.”

The contrast shows that readiness is demonstrated by faithful service.

3. The 2 Degrees of Punishment — People Are Free to Choose Their Actions, Not Their Consequences.

We say that “you may be free to choose your actions, but you are not free to choose your consequences.” That maxim is true in this text. The servant who acted prudently will be rewarded; the one who acted foolishly will be punished.

Christian reward is eternity with Christ, and it’s not our merit but Christ’s. It’s not earned, but it is graciously given by faith in Him. The unbeliever, the bad servant’s “reward,” is punishment—eternity without God in hell.

I draw your attention to the “various degrees” of punishment applied by the just Judge. Sometimes we erroneously think that “Heaven and Hell” are a sort of “socialism:” everyone will be treated equally. That’s not true, as a matter of fact/illustration, we may rest assured of this: Hitler will be judged more severely than the random guy out there. And no one will be judged more severely than Satan himself.

4. Application — This Is Not Salvation by Works Theology; This Is Faith Bearing Fruit Theology.

It’s important to notice that the first imagery emphasizes the spirit of readiness, while the second imagery emphasizes the actual work/service: Waiting is not intellectually passive, but active service and worship.

“The Test,” Jesus’ intentional delay, functions like an important divider between true Christianity and fake Christianity. Jesus’ absence doesn’t create the servants’ character—it reveals them. Those who truly believe in Christ will be living faithfully and waiting patiently for His Second Coming. Those who don’t, even though they fill our churches’ pews, will be living as if He won’t be coming.

The final measure isn’t merely whether the servant expected the master’s return, but whether he was faithful during the master’s absence.

We can return to the beginning of this sermon, the story of the Jewish Rabbi downplaying Christ’s ascension and Second Coming. We patiently, faithfully, and joyfully choose not to downplay, not to act arrogantly, and not even to respond to his attacks.

We serve Jesus only, and not the arrogant ones; we are too busy serving Christ, not mocking Him; all we want is to be found faithful in His sight—not in other people's sight.

Our lives should function as a great testimony of the doctrine of Christ's Second Coming!

Conclusion — There Are 2 Things Fascinating in This Passage

A) The progression:

Luke 12:35–38:

Are you ready for His return?

Luke 12:39–40:

Please, don't try to guess His time.

Luke 12:41–44:

Please, serve while you wait.

Luke 12:45–48:

The delay reveals who belongs to Him and who doesn't.

B) We talked about “the degrees of judgment” in the third point. Please note that it is not limited to the negative aspect (punishment), but it is also positive (salvation): Heaven won't be a socialist land; there are rewards awaiting God's people. That's why Jesus encourages us to live a purposeful, godly, holy, and evangelistic life!

He graciously saved us, and as if that was not enough, he rewards us! See how beautiful it is when Jesus says: “The Master will put the servant at the table and will serve him!” The roles are temporarily switched as he rewards us in heaven.