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So, for instance:

*Some farmers, well before planting/harvest time, will have their machinery all set up, ready to go, ... Others, they wait until it's nearly time to plant/harvest, until they get the machine out of the shed, and then all of a sudden, they realise they can't use it, because they need some spare parts (that aren't even in the country).*

*Some farmers, will have their **ground** ready well in advance, but their neighbour (when the planting rain comes) all of a sudden, they realise the seed-bed's not right, or the weeds are out of control, and so planting gets delayed...*

The difference between success and failure, often has a lot to do with one's state of readiness...

Today, we're talking about "Spiritual readiness"...

We've been studying the Gospel of Luke, And we have come into a section where for the next several weeks, Jesus has a lot to say about "**being** ready". **And** He has a lot to say about the Kingdom of God, and about how to enter the Kingdom of God.

And I've given **today's** message the title: "Faith and **faithfulness**", because faith isn't really faith, if it's not accompanied by faithfulness... And being ready (for the return of Jesus), is about faithfulness.

Over the last couple of weeks, Jesus has been teaching us about “storing up treasure in heaven” – preparing for the life to come. **This** life is temporary; Everything that we could possibly gain in this life, is temporary. And so Jesus turns our eyes, and our planning, towards Eternity. And Disciples of Jesus **live** for eternity.

And part of this “living for eternity”, has to be, about “being ready for it”. It’s about “**getting** ready” (come go faith), and it’s about “staying ready” (faithfulness).

*Whenever Robyn and I are going out somewhere, (I don't know if you've noticed or not, but I don't like dressing up) ... And so I leave it until the last possible minute, until I put on my glad rags ... Because I get into trouble if I get into my good clothes, and then go out and get dirt & grease all over them ... It's pointless “getting ready”, unless I'm going to “stay ready” ...*

And it's the same with the Spiritual life – it's pointless “getting ready”, unless we “stay ready”.... You see, Christianity – the Christian faith, is not like some kind of life insurance policy we take out once, then forget about it... It's not about feeling “Oh, I'm covered – I can do what I like now, and if I die, I'm going to be in glory with Jesus.”...

You see, faithfulness, is keeping on in the faith. And that is what readiness is.

Righto:

Jesus gave His Disciples 4 quick images of readiness.

1.

Firstly, He says: “**Let your loins be girded**”. Sounds like a recipe “Baste & gird the loins, and bake them in a hot oven”...

Now, our Bible reading today said: <sup>35</sup> “**Stay dressed for action**”

That’s what it means, but Jesus actually said “**Let your loins be girded**”

In Jesus' day, “In the Middle East”, they would wear long flowing robes – good for airflow, but not so good for:

- running;
- fighting a battle;
- hard work...

And for a bloke to get himself ready for fast movement or hard work, he’d hitch up his robes, and tuck it all into his belt. And then his legs wouldn’t be hindered with his dress flapping about to trip him up. So, he’d pull it all up, and tighten up his belt to hold it all in place. And that’s what it means to “gird your loins”.

Just as you get ready for work, be ready for the coming of Jesus.

2.

Secondly, **keep your lamps burning.**

When Jesus returns, we don't know if it's going to be day time or night time – I guess it depends on what part of the world you're in. Some parts of the world will inevitably be in daylight. Other parts will be in darkness. What Jesus is saying, is “Don't tire of waiting”.

3.

The third image:

**be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.**

In other words, don't get caught out when Jesus appears. Your Master is coming. Be ready to open the door for Jesus, immediately... Don't let other concerns take you away from being ready....

And there's a blessing attached here. If we are ready for Jesus – I mean if we are **really** ready for Jesus, and if we are **keenly** awaiting His return, when He arrives, Our Lord is going to be so pleased, that He will bless us. He, will serve us. (Think on that for a moment: the heavenly banquet for those who are really looking forward to the return of Jesus...)

4.

And then, the fourth picture of readiness, is a little bit different

If you knew what time a thief was going to break into your house, you wouldn't leave your house unattended would you???

And just like you don't know what time the thief is going to break into your house (because thieves don't tend to ring ahead and make an appointment),,,, we don't know what time Jesus is going to arrive... So be ready (constantly).

Now, all of these images are analogies... – they are images that are giving us a message...

Obviously Jesus is **not** saying:

- “Don't ever take a nap”
- Always dress like a dork with your pants pulled up high; and
- Leave the lights on all night...

The message is “Get ready for Jesus, and stay ready for Jesus, because you don't know when He's going to come”...

And so, it's about faithfulness... And it's a reminder of the reward of being faithful to our Lord... Jesus is going to be so delighted, when He returns, to find His Disciples (you and I), faithfully living the Christian life... How good is that...

Now, after Jesus had said all that (about being ready), that must have got the Apostle Peter thinking...

“Jesus, is what You just said, for everyone, or just for us???”

In other words:

- Are you telling unbelievers to be ready?; or
- Are you telling your followers to be ready?; or

- Are you telling **us** to be ready (the apostles/church leaders).

And it seems to me, that Jesus' answer indicates that He's talking to everyone, but especially His disciples, and extra-especially leaders within the church.

So:

- Unbelievers need to get ready, by repenting of sin, and turning to the Lord Jesus Christ – to stop living for self, and start living for Him; And then
- **all** Christians/Disciples of Jesus, need to maintain their readiness (by being faithful to our Lord); And ;
- it also seems clear, that the greater the privilege (and servant leadership is a privilege {granted by God}), the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility.

Jesus told a parable to spell that all out. Let's work our way through it.

**"Who then is the faithful and wise manager [steward]"**

Now, when it comes to slaves/servants, the "steward" would be in charge of the whole household, whenever his master went away.

So, what's the image Jesus is giving us here?

- What's the household of God?  
It's the church/Christians/Disciples of Jesus who are keenly awaiting the return of our Master (The Lord Jesus Christ)  
You and I, are the household of God
- Who are the servants/slaves?  
We are. If you are a Disciples of Jesus, you are a servant/slave of Jesus.
- Who is the steward/manager that Jesus has placed over his household?  
Leaders in the church (Ministers; Pastors; Elders; Preachers; Teachers)  
The Lord Jesus has appointed leaders in the church, to oversee his household...

And Jesus is asking, "What's a good one of them look like?"

Well, what do you reckon a good leader in the church looks like?

The Master has set the Steward over His Household, **to give them their portion of food at the proper time?**

You see, the Lord appoints leaders in the church, to serve the church – to care for the flock:

- to shepherd the people of God;
- to teach the people of God;
- to care for the people of God...

And good leaders in the church, will be blessed if that's what they're doing when Jesus returns. Now, I don't know what that reward looks like. Jesus talked about putting the faithful steward **over all his possessions**.

And here is a spiritual truth: If you and I faithfully serve our Lord and serve others (in the Name of Jesus), the reward is an even greater entrustment. Now, we don't know exactly what that looks like, but I do know that if it's a heavenly reward, it's gotta be a beauty, hey....

**But....**

A few weeks ago, I told you that "But" is one of my favourite words in the bible. So often, it lays out the predicament, but then it says "But"... But through Christ Jesus, everything is changed, and everything is made right...

Only here, the word "But" is used in a different way... The faithful and wise steward, who oversees the household of God, and does it well:

- shepherding the people of God;
- teaching the people of God;
- caring for the people of God...

They are rewarded...

**But!!!**

Sadly, not all leaders in the church have been good stewards...  
And you know that. There is nothing worse than an  
organisation that's meant to be filled with the Holiness of  
God, but is corrupted by sometimes the most vile sin...

A bad leader loses their sense of the imminent return of Jesus.  
And they stop living for Jesus, and they return to the values of  
the world instead of the values of the Kingdom of God...

They:

- mistreat the people of God; and
- live like the faithless do (eat; drink; be merry);
- some become drunks....

Has this not been the shameful history of the Christian  
church???

- At times the leadership of the Christian church has been held by people who lust after political power...
- Think of the conquistadores who in the Name of Christianity, invaded lands; stole their riches; and murdered any who stood in their way;
- Think of the inquisitions, where anyone who disobeyed the orders of the church hierarchy, were executed...
- Think of the battles of Christendom in England through the middle-ages, and the battles of the Roman Catholic Vs the COE... And whoever happened to hold the most

power at the time, would oppress the other...; and

- think of the trials of those who were put to death because they would hold to the word of God rather than follow the perverted teaching of a corrupt Pope or Bishop (of the day)...

And is it not our shameful history today???

It is shameful – the blight on the Christian church, when some leaders have become serial paedophiles... And even more shameful where an institution goes into damage control and fails to protect the victims...

And think of the celebrity pastors of mega-churches, who make themselves rich off the offerings of their congregation, and the tele-evangelist who owns multiple mansions and flies around in his private jet...

And think of the high-profile pastors who, some have:

- taken advantage of women in their church, and secretly cultivated adulterous relationships;
- gotten hooked on drugs & alcohol; and
- been living an outright lie

And all the while, promoting themselves as God's spokesmen whom you have to listen to and obey...

It is obscene... And the sad thing is, some started out as men and women of faith, but then they became corrupt...

Now, if you were Satan and wanted to destroy the Kingdom of God, wouldn't you do it, just like that... If Satan can corrupt a leader within the church, it leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and makes a beautiful work of God, smell putrid...

You know what??? Evil leaders in the church eventually get exposed, but even what is hidden today, Jesus knows about it...

What will Jesus do??? Where's the justice??? Let me tell you: The image Jesus gives, is a picture of justice. "Justice is coming, and it's pretty gruesome..."

If you have any doubt at all in your mind, as to what Jesus thinks of those who misuse their position within the church, let me clear that up for you:

Jesus said:

**45** But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk,  
**46** the master of that servant 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 put him with the unfaithful.

Now, if you hold to the human teaching of OSAS, you're going to have a lot of trouble with that verse...

because it sounds like it's saying that if a leader in the church:

- stops living for eternity, and begins living like the faithless;
- abuses the people whom they're supposed to be caring for; and
- lives a life of greed and drunkenness and lives a lie,,,

it sounds like Jesus is saying, that they're going to be punished, but more than that, they're going to lose their salvation and find themselves in Hell....

Do you know why it sounds like that? Because that's exactly what Jesus is saying...

How could He possibly be meaning anything else?

**46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him (Day of Judgment) and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces (the Greek word means "dismember"/"chop him up") and put him with the unfaithful.** Where is that??? Those who do not have faith, won't be found in the Kingdom of God... They go to the place of eternal torment (far away from God).

For me (as a Pastor of a church), I read that with fear and trembling... And that's the way I'm supposed to read it.

In James 3:1, it says ... you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

That's why I read this with fear and trembling.

God appoints leaders in the church. But a leader in the church is **not** his own master. My Master, is your Master – The Lord Jesus Christ.

And a leader is not appointed to Lord it over the Household of God – He is to **serve** the Household of God – to care for God's people, and to teach them, and to bring them closer to God...

The leaders in your church must keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, and living for eternity – living as the Kingdom of God... And be ever mindful of the imminent return of Jesus.

Now, there's an old saying "Ignorance is no excuse", and that's sorta true, because no one is truly ignorant. God reveals Himself in creation, and God reveals Himself as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed...

But, the more we know of the things of God, and the greater the blessing that we've received from God, the greater the responsibility we have, to live in faithfulness...

Jesus was quite blunt, when He said <sup>47</sup> **And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating.**

But if he didn't know, then it would only be a light beating... It's the same as what James 4:17 says: <sup>17</sup> **So whoever**

knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Do you get that? If you know God's will, and you don't do it, that's sin. And "being ready for Jesus," isn't merely about forgiveness. And it isn't only about "not doing the wrong thing" – it's about being faithful to our Lord...

At one time, I was a sinner, totally undeserving of the forgiveness and grace and mercy of God... But in His great mercy, Jesus was willingly nailed to the cross. My Lord, paid the penalty that I deserved... And He did it for you too... The gift of God is beyond comprehension... In Christ Jesus, we have been so richly blessed with grace; mercy; eternal life; the glory of God....

It is a free gift. We couldn't earn it – I could never do that much good...

By faith we are saved... We believe it. Jesus did this for us, and so in faith, we repent of our sin, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are born again (into the Kingdom of God), and we are saved.

And some folk will tell you, "That's it"... The thing is though, Jesus says something different. Jesus says:

**Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.**

If Jesus has so graciously given us the gift of salvation, what does our faithfulness to Jesus look like?

Godly living. If Jesus has saved us into the Kingdom of God, it's not for us to go on living as the faithless do – Citizens of the Kingdom of God, live by the Spirit of God – that's what Kingdom living is...

And those who have been entrusted with servant leadership in the Kingdom of God, all the more so...

And isn't that a good thing??? Isn't it good, when the church is a group of people, who are living out the Kingdom of God??? Isn't that a good thing???

And isn't it a good thing, when leaders in the church model this Kingdom living, and serve the People of God rather than fleece them???

That's what it means to be ready – Being a faithful Disciple of Jesus; Living out the Kingdom of God, as we keenly await His coming.

And so, being ready for Jesus, is about faithfulness. We **get** ready by faith. And we **remain** ready through faithfulness.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we are so thankful for the wonderful mercy  
You have extended to us.

Thank you for the Gift of Salvation;  
Thank you for Your sacrifice on the Cross;  
Thank You for faith itself.

And Lord,  
We pray that by Your Holy Spirit,  
we would maintain our readiness.  
That we would continue on,  
faithfully living for You;  
faithfully witnessing to those around us; and  
faithfully serving You by loving others.

And Lord,  
we pray for our leaders.  
May they/we be good stewards.  
Seeking not fleshly gain,  
but seeking first the Kingdom of God,  
and Your righteousness.

to the glory of God.  
Amen.