

Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-1-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 12:32-40

³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell 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. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ³⁵“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be 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. ³⁷Blessed 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. ³⁸If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. ³⁹“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. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

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This selection of verses (32-40) is an odd choice by those who choose our lectionary readings because vs. 32-34 share more in common with 12:22-31 than with 12:35-40. These first 3 verses of this passage harken back to vs. 22-31 in which Jesus urges the disciples to not be worried. The related exhortation here (do not be afraid) matches more closely with a prohibition against worry and concern than with the exhortations to watchfulness that follow. The community of disciples (what we would call the church today) is referred to as a “flock” in Acts 20:28-29 and 1 Peter 5:2-3. Here, Jesus adds the qualifier “little.” Perhaps this is a recognition of the small size of the community of the faithful, but it may also be a term of familiarity, tenderness, and endearment. This whole passage should be read in light of this term; that is, the address is to the flock as a group, not to individuals only. We tend to read these verses (and much of the Bible) as though they were God’s rules of conduct for individuals. Instead, Jesus is concerned with the actions and faithfulness of the whole community of faith. The kingdom is not God’s gift to one faithful person; rather, it is God’s gift to the community of faith; to the flock. The instruction to sell possessions and give alms, also is plural: “Y’all sell y’all’s possessions and y’all give alms.” This could certainly apply to individual Christians, but it is also a reminder to the church that we are to be less concerned with our own riches than we are with serving our neighbors in need. Jesus urges the flock to fashion money-holding containers for themselves that do not become obsolete or useless. This should call our minds back to the storehouses of the rich fool from last week’s parable. The man’s goods didn’t last forever. The implication here is that generosity toward others is a gift that lasts. Love of others; service of others will be the currency of the kingdom of God. If the church keeps that proper perspective, then the church will be found doing exactly what Jesus wills when he returns.

³⁵“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶be 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. ³⁷Blessed 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. ³⁸If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

That theme of Jesus' return comes into sharper focus in these verses. In v. 35, Jesus commands the disciples to literally "fasten your belt around your waist" or "gird up your loins." It is a command that features prominently in the Passover story (see Exodus 12:11). There, the people were to eat the Passover meal hurriedly and dressed for their journey. One translation/interpretation of this verb I particularly like is "keep your aprons on." Think of an apron for cooking or an apron for doing blacksmithing work. Also, Jesus commands those in the community of faith to have their lamps lit. This calls to mind the commandment to the people of Israel in the Old Testament to keep the lamps of the sanctuary burning (see, for example, Exodus 27:20 and Leviticus 24:2-4). The idea is that those in the "little flock" should be as watchful as their spiritual ancestors were in waiting upon the God of Israel; as prepared as their forebears were when God led them out of Egypt. Such watchfulness and preparation, sadly, is rare among Christian churches today. Such an emphasis tends to result in hypervigilance and a paranoid obsession with the "end times." Instead, Jesus wants us to be about the work of the kingdom as we await his return. The command to keep aprons on and lamps lit is given in order that when Jesus does return he will find us busy with the mission he has handed on to us. And there is an interesting twist: When the master comes and finds the servants with their aprons on and the lamps lit, paradoxically *he* will serve *them*! The Greek word for the master's action here is the same as the actions of the servants in v. 35. The master is the one who will don his apron and serve the servants. This underscores Jesus' servant leadership and drives home the point that rewards await faithful servants.

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Here, Jesus switches metaphors yet again, playing off the notion of unexpected arrival. Now, instead of being compared to a master returning from a wedding banquet, the Son of Man is compared to a thief in the night. I don't recall ever seeing a stained-glass interpretation of this scene or a depiction of Jesus as a burglar. Nonetheless, this is quite a graphic and evocative image. Jesus tells this not necessarily to scare the disciples (for he tells them at the beginning of this section not to be afraid), but rather to encourage them to be ready when the Son of Man returns unexpectedly. Being "ready" means to be found living out Jesus' kingdom message and mission rather than living a life driven by fear, anxiety, greed, or gluttony.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. How does Jesus' image of the church as a "little flock" impact your understanding of what the church is?**
- 2. Where do you think your treasure is? Where do you think your heart is? Based on how you answered these questions, do you think Jesus' saying in v. 34 is true?**
- 3. What do you think our congregation can do together to be ready for Jesus' return? How are we to "be dressed for action" and "have our lamps lit?"**