

Keep your lamp burning: being a faithful servant
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Some of the glorious little moments of parenthood are when you graduate from a season. Getting out of the diaper phase is a perfect example of this happy transition. Not having to buy diapers, change diapers, and lug them around feels so good. When your kids start driving that's a great time, too. I mean, there's some new anxieties, but not having to always drop them off and pick them up is wonderful.

A new phase that Korby and I have really enjoyed was the ability to leave our kids home alone. Not needing a babysitter saves on the pocketbook and organizing a babysitter can be challenging. Korby and I love taking walks together, so when our boys got old enough to stay at home by themselves we could go on a walk whenever we wanted. We loved it.

But when that happens, when you start leaving 4 boys home - alone - there are some new concerns, right? Are they going to kill each other? How will they behave when we're gone? Will they follow the rules or will they break them with nobody around? Will they get their work done or will they procrastinate? You know the saying: when the cat is gone the mice come out to play. When mom and dad are gone, will the kids be faithful to the rules of the house and their responsibilities?

Jesus is looking down upon us and he's wondering the same thing (if an all-knowing, all-seeing God can *wonder* about anything). Jesus has left us home alone, too. He came to us to save and to rescue. Jesus performed this amazing work for us on the cross so we could be forgiven of our sins and brought back into a relationship with God. But when his work was done he left saying, "I'm going to my Father, but I'm coming back again. When I'm gone, make sure you obey the house rules, get all your work done, and (by the way) don't kill each other." Here's the question: *Will we be found faithful?*

Two weeks ago we studied a parable Jesus told about servants staying ready for the return of their master. Our faith is being tested in a chaotic and hostile world. While we're tempted to give in and disobey the voice of the Lord, we need to remember that Jesus is coming back again. If we are found faithful, Jesus will make sure that we, his servants, are rewarded. But if we're not faithful... well, we're going to read something about that today. The passage for this morning continues this metaphor of the master/servant relationship. And Jesus focuses in on a few new angles that we need to consider as we think about staying ready and prepared for his second coming. Turn with me to Luke 12 and let's read vs. 41-48 (READ).

Our passage begins with Peter interrupting Jesus and asking him, "Lord, are these words for us or for everyone?" At the start of this section, it's not so obvious who Jesus is teaching. It says at the beginning that he's teaching his disciples. But as you progress through the stories the crowds are present and listening, too. In fact, the crowds are the one's asking the

questions. So, Peter is scratching his head a little bit about who this teaching is for. And then - vintage Jesus - he doesn't really answer Peter's question. Why wouldn't Jesus just say, "Oh, sorry for the confusion, Peter; this is meant for you," or "Oh, I was telling this for the sake of the crowds." Why doesn't Jesus just say who he's teaching?

You know, Jesus has this statement that he loves to say: "whoever has ears to hear, let him hear." It's Jesus' way of throwing the question back onto his disciples, the crowds, and to us, asking, "Well, you tell me? Is this for you or not?" We learned earlier in Luke that the definition of a Christ-follower is one who hears and obeys God's words. So, when Jesus asks, "Do you have ears to hear?" he's asking, "Are you my follower?" If you're not a follower, then you won't think this is for you; you'll think this is for others. But if you are a follower you'll take everything I say and apply it to your life. Christians aren't people who have paid their club dues; they're not people who've jumped through certain religious hoops. Christians are people who obey the voice of the Lord.

I know sometimes when you're here listening to messages you'll hear something and think, "Oh, I wish so-n-so was here to listen to this." We might elbow our wife to listen up or say to our husband on the way home from church something like, "That was for you this morning!" We might even joke about that from time to time with each other, but deep down there's something very wrong, very dangerous for you to always hear God's word and think other people need to hear it.

One of the absolute worst things you can do, my dear friends, is tune out the instructions and teachings of Jesus saying, "Oh, this isn't for me. I've heard this already. I've already learned that. This must be for someone else." If I could put on my pastor hat for moment and say this: one of the greatest dangers to your faith, my good brothers and sisters, is a prideful heart that says, "Yeah, I've already heard that before. Already learned it. I already prayed the prayer. I've already been baptized; I've already made a decision to follow Jesus. I've already repented," like you still don't need to repent. Thinking about faith like that lends itself to pride, disobedience, and self-righteousness - three things that God opposes and judges. When we live that way we are proving we don't have ears to hear. Too many of us Christians think we should be in some advanced Christianity classes when we keep failing Faith 101 - obey the word of Jesus. Jesus says die to yourself, but we refuse. Jesus says, "Count other people more significant and important than yourself," yet won't even do that for our spouse or for our family, the people we say we love the most. The scriptures are clear that we are to give God and his kingdom work our very best, but we constantly give him the scraps and the leftovers of our lives. We lavishly spend on us, but have pennies left over for the cause of Christ.

Too many times I've seen Christians in moments of struggle, a crisis of faith, looking for answers, but when answers are provided and direction is given the response goes something like, "Oh, I've already done that. That hasn't worked" like we only follow Jesus' words when we think they work or when we think they make sense. When I give my standard response - when in doubt, repent; when you're struggling and confused on what to do, repent and turn back to

God - do you think, "I've already done that, Brian. Tell me something I don't know." Ok, here's something you don't know - you don't know that you need to repent and turn to Jesus everyday of your life. You don't know that Jesus isn't asking you to have faith in him; he's asking you to be faithful to him. And even when our trouble found us instead of us finding the trouble (like a car accident or infertility or being widowed) God's help is found through the faithful acting in this world and so when we fail at being faithful we fail at receiving God's help. Jesus doesn't give Peter an answer to his question precisely for this reason: he wants him to see and recognize that no matter who you are, no matter how long you've been walking with Jesus, and even if you're a part of the inner circle like Peter, that everything that Jesus teaches is for you.

Jesus offers 3 plots or possible storylines about being a servant that gives us a picture of what it means to be faithful. I want to look at each one. The first plot is the blessing God gives to a servant who is faithful. It almost sounds like a beatitude from Matthew - *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes*. The reward (or another reward as we looked at several rewards from the previous passage) of Jesus is additional responsibility; look at vs. 44, "Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions." When is more work a reward? It's a reward when a servant takes joy in pleasing his master. In fact, more responsibility is a double reward. First of all, it's a reward in that the master has found me so faithful that he would trust more responsibility to me. What a compliment; that's clear affirmation! But secondly, more responsibility means more to be faithful with, which gives me more opportunity to please my master. I would bet most of us have had some person in our life (our mother, our father, an excellent boss, a favorite teacher) who we respected and loved so much that we enjoyed making them happy. That's the picture here. Additional responsibility wasn't a punishment, it was a gift.

Vs. 43 says the faithful servant is seen *so doing* when the master comes home. What is that; what is she *so doing*? Well, in vs 42 we're told that the master sets the servant over his household. To do what, you think? To manage it well whatever that might include. In this I think we learn what God is looking for from us; I think he's telling us what it looks like to be a faithful servant in this world that needs Jesus. Faithful servants manage what God has given to impact the world with his grace. That's what we are called to do even when the pressure increases. Those who do that receive the reward.

You can do something with that today, FBC. Look at what God has given you. Look at the resources he's entrusted to you; look at the gifts and skills you have by the grace of God. We all have an abundance of something; that abundance is due to God and he's calling you to faithfully use that to make a kingdom impact in your family, your neighborhood, and your world. Some of you have an abundance of people skills, some of you have an abundance of teaching talents. Some of you are so gifted with the use of your hands. Musical or athletic ability. Money, time, experiences, and even square footage - everything God has given to us in abundance is to be faithfully used for God's purposes here on earth. That's what a faithful servant does.

The 2nd episode deals with the scenario of a servant not being faithful with his master's authority or resources. Two things stand out that demonstrate his unfaithfulness. He wrongly presumes two things. First of all, he presumes that he has more time than he does. The first thing out of his mouth is, "Ah, my master is delayed in coming home." And then in vs. 46 we're told that the master does return home at a time that the servant doesn't expect him. It's very obvious Jesus is trying to highlight the danger of thinking you have more time than you do.

But also, forgetting or ignoring the imminent return of Jesus inevitably leads to our selfishness. From the story, we see that the unfaithful servant was quite harsh towards others. But that harsh and drunken behavior comes from selfishly privileging oneself. That's the origins of evil actions. We hurt others because we prefer ourselves. We want something and with no fear of God before our eyes we will happily run over or take advantage of others to get what we want even if it's just the pleasure of seeing others in pain.

Of course, we saw the consequences of being unfaithful. It's a horrific and hyperbolic expression of judgment that is meant to emphasize the absolute terror and certainty of God's punishment of the unfaithful. May God spare every one of us. So, that's the second plot: faithful servants don't presume the time or selfishly prefer themselves.

One more plotline; let's read vs. 47-48 (READ). The point Jesus is making is fairly simple: servants are held accountable by how much they know and how much they've been given. So, if you know what your master wants, if you've been told what he expects of you, you're going to be held more accountable by your master than the servant who doesn't know what the master wants or expects. Or if your master has given you much, he is going to expect a lot, too. That's what the summary means when Jesus says (vs. 48b), "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand more."

I'll be honest with you: that wakes me up when I look around and see what God has given us; when I see what God has given me. What resources do we lack, FBC, to be faithful servants? I mean, God has given us so much to be faithful servants. We know his word; it's taught every week. We have opportunities to grow in our faith. God has spared us systematic and organized oppression; there's no government or group threatening our safety and wellbeing for our faith. We have so much time on our hands we literally spend hours each day playing games on our devices and jealously scroll through facebook. Some of our greatest frustrations are not knowing what recreational activities we should enjoy or hobbies to pursue. Even today, right now, you are increasing the kind of accountability God will hold you to by listening to this message.

Maybe that freaks some of you out! Maybe some of you are thinking, "What am I doing here? Maybe I should stop coming so much. Maybe I shouldn't read God's word. Then I can claim ignorance." Yeah, I know what you mean, but that won't work. Because here's the deal: your only hope is Jesus. The Jesus you get from this word; the Jesus we all gather to worship

and learn from. If you stop coming, if you stop reading your Bible, if you turn your back to Jesus trying to escape being accountable to him you turn your back on the only One, the only book, and the only community that offers you hope and life your judgment is sure. So, we're all in this interesting little dilemma. We have to keep turning to Jesus; we have to keep seeking him through the scriptures with the people of God. If we don't, we'll perish. Who else has the words of life? Yet, the more we turn, the more we take in and receive from Jesus, his Word, and his church the more we become accountable to him; the more we intensify our judgment if we act unfaithfully as a servant.

Do you know what I call this? I call this mercy; mercy from God. God relentlessly pursues you and me and heightens our need more and more to follow him, to give everything to him. While what we are learning is sobering, it's mercy.

So, here's the third plotline we learn: the more we know and have the more accountable to God we become. Here are the three things we've learned today about being a servant. I think Jesus' goal from this is that we could be faithful servants. May that happen for you and me.

Key vs. Luke 12:48

Questions for the week

- What was the most important thing you heard today? How come?
- We're accountable to God based on what we've been given; when you look at your life, what do you think God will hold you accountable for?
- What do you need to do to resist thinking, "I've already know that?"