

Prayers

To God

Play some inspirational music, perhaps some Christian music, and let your spirit be blessed by what the Lord can reveal to you through being immersed in the music.

For myself

Ask the Lord to heal you in body, mind and spirit. Let the Holy Spirit search your heart to reveal those things within your life that need His healing touch; for we may be aware of some of our bodily needs but not always some of our deeper spiritual needs..

For others

Pray for those who are troubled in their minds

Father God, Your compassion knows no bounds, and You understand all people because You have made them. Bless those who suffer in their minds, we pray, and where medicine has no answers because of the complexities of the human brain, work by Your sovereign power to bring relief and blessing to those whose lives are blighted by such illness. Thank You Lord Jesus. **AMEN**

Meditation

Where may we begin to find peace within this world?

Within the quiet of solitude and serenity?
In the company of other believers?
Whilst doing the work of the Kingdom?
In the home where care and love abide?
Lost in 'wonder love and praise'?
On the streets, offering Jesus to wounded souls?
Speaking out for the poor and the oppressed?
In a quiet place of Bible study and prayer?

Or is it that peace may only be found when we realise
That God is within every circumstance of life,
So when we open our eyes and see Him
Anywhere and everywhere,
We know that He will always be with us.

For Christ Himself is our perfect peace.

Bible Passage

Luke 12:32-40

³² ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's delight to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell what you possess and give to charity. Fill up wallets for yourselves that never empty, that have an unlimited store of treasure in heaven, inaccessible to thieves or decay; ³⁴ for wherever your treasure is, your heart will be there too.*”**

³⁵ ***“Be dressed and ready for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like servants waiting for the return of their master from a wedding feast, who are ready to open the door for him as soon as he returns and knocks. ³⁷ How happy are those servants who are alert when the master comes; I tell you the truth, he will get ready to serve and sit them down to eat, and he will come and serve them! ³⁸ If he comes and finds them ready in the middle of the night or the early morning, blessed are those servants.*”**

³⁹ ***“You should know this: if the homeowner had known when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be burgled! ⁴⁰ So you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming when He is least expected!”*”**

Review

We finished yesterday's reading with the famous Biblical quote, *'strive for His kingdom, and all these things will be given to you.'* (12:31). This promise is given by Jesus to His disciples to assure them that they do not have to worry about this life. God is indeed generous, and it is both wise and safe for us to trust Him for everything instead of living in a state of fear and worry (12:22-31). Jesus calls for this level of faith because it will lead us into accepting some of the deeper spiritual truths He came to reveal, and as this passage begins to stress, this includes His return. Jesus does not reveal many details of this here, but for the first time in the Gospel, He insists that this is God's plan and purpose.

In this our passage today, Jesus continues to encourage the disciple to seek God's Kingdom (12:32), urging His disciples to store up *'treasures in heaven'* (12:34), and to look to God not to the things of this world. He then uses a brief parable to teach about the coming of this Kingdom (12:35-38). It is about servants waiting for their master to come home, but who find themselves being blessed by the one they serve! Our passage then closes with Jesus' famous call for us to live in a state of readiness for His return. We cannot know when this will happen, but we must be ready if we want to receive His blessing (12:39,40).

It is not easy to stand back from everyday life and live in this way, even when it comes with Jesus' guarantee that complete and selfless trust in God will ultimately be rewarded. We are promised that it is our *'Father's delight to give you the Kingdom'*, but the next two verses (12:33,34) contain some firm commands that are hard to keep. Jesus says *'sell what you possess and give to charity'* (12:33), and there are no easy get out clauses; it means what it says and it is addressed in general to all His disciples!

How are we to respond to a command like this? We must take account of the fact that in the Acts of the Apostles, after Pentecost, Luke reports that the disciples obeyed this command when setting up the early church (2:44,45, 4:32-35). They did indeed sell their possessions and distribute it to the poor. We can try to get around the command if we spot from the rest of Scripture that Jesus did not always require people to sell all their wealth. For example,

when he called Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1f.), He seems to have been happy for him to give away a half of his possessions and wealth (19:8), but not all. But I am not sure we can or should try to water down this command; rather, we should accept it and respond to it according to our circumstances (see 'Discipleship'). Of course, it is in doing this that we build up for ourselves heavenly treasures; or as Jesus puts it here, *'wallets that never empty'* (12:33). It is easy to give lip service to the great saying, *'where your treasure is, your heart will be there too'* (12:34), but it is another to build up real treasure in heaven as Jesus suggests.

Most people are content living day by day with the security of personal routines of work and rest and sufficient wealth to sustain life for as long as necessary. But how different is the picture Jesus puts before us! The second paragraph of this passage urges God's people to think of things very differently, and see themselves as 'servants' of the Master (12:35-38). Jesus' parable of the servants waiting for the return of their Master contains something of a surprise however. The first part is to be expected, for servants should surely be ready for the return of a master from a night out (12:36), but what happens next is odd and totally unexpected. Jesus says that the master will *'get ready to serve and sit them down to eat, and he will come and serve them!'* (12:37). This is extraordinary! The master serves the servants!

This parable must have drawn gasps of astonishment from those who first heard it; like Peter's astonishment when Jesus bent to wash his feet (John 13:7,8). What is going on here? Those of us who read the Gospels should realise that although Jesus often told parables that drew on ordinary observations of life, He often changed or twisted these observations. He did this in order to say something completely extraordinary about Himself or God's work, because what he had come to do in this world was indeed completely out of the ordinary. So while we cannot imagine the master of a house gathering the servants around and waiting on them 'hand and foot', in any generation, this is what God plans for us! If we are ready for our Saviour, then when He comes we will find that he does more for us than we for Him, so whenever He comes, *'blessed are those servants'* (12:38).

What does this mean? I suggest that Jesus' parable here is prophetic of Jesus' gift of salvation for all who have faith in Him, who 'wait' for Him and for His return. Jesus does in fact minister to us in remarkable ways, but He does so supremely in winning our salvation, and no interpretation of this parable can ignore this.

As we get to the end of this passage, we realise that Jesus has introduced to us something new in Luke's Gospel, and this is the clearly expressed idea that Jesus will return. Jesus has already spoken to the disciples about His death and His resurrection (9:22), and has sought to encourage them in the face of this awful prospect. But now, the idea that he will return is radically new; it gives hope to any who might think that God is deserting them! So using the famous example of the *'thief in the night'* (John 10:1,10, 1 Thess 5:2F. Rev 3:3), Jesus calls on the disciples to live 'always ready' for the return of their Saviour, after His death.

In all, Jesus begins here in this passage to reveal more to the disciples about God's eternal purposes, and although we know about Christ's return, the disciples did not. They needed to be told, and this is the record of Jesus telling them. In all our debates about the end times and Christ's return today, it is worth remembering that when Jesus first told the disciples about this, He never divulged any information about God's plan or when it would be completed. He simply told the disciples to be ready.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V33 ***'fill up wallets for yourselves that never empty'***

Other translations:

'provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out' (NIV)

'make purses for yourselves that do not wear out' (NRSV)

The Greek verb in this sentence is a very open word, 'poiew', which means many things based on the idea of 'making' something; according to the setting it could be translated 'make', 'produce', 'accomplish', 'celebrate', 'complete'. The sentence here is not just about making purses or wallets which are hard wearing (as implied by the NIV and the NRSV). It also means ensuring the purse or wallet is sufficiently full that it never runs out. I have therefore given a quite different translation that conveys just this, and it makes much more sense when placed alongside the next sentence.

V33 ***'decay'***

Other translations:

'no moth destroys' (NIV, NRSV etc.)

We are used to the traditional and strictly accurate translation 'no moth destroys', but this is a phrase that is not exactly in common use. Colloquially, it refers to what we might call 'decay', so I have used this word instead.

V35 ***'be dressed and ready for action'***

Other translations:

'be dressed ready for service' (NIV)

'let your loins be girded about' (King James)

The Hebrew phrase here is accurately translated by the King James version. Because we do not use loin cloths today this colloquialism is now inappropriate in a translation. It combines the ideas of being appropriately dressed and ready for some form of action.

V37 ***'get ready to serve'***

Other translations:

'dress himself to serve' (NIV)

'he will fasten his belt' (NRSV)

The Greek sentence is indeed 'fasten his belt', but we understand that in the first century, this action was necessary to get ready to serve others. Jesus' parable takes a dramatic turn here (see study).

V38 ***'in the middle of the night or the early morning'***

Other translations:

'in the second or third watch of the morning' (NIV)

'during the middle of the night or near dawn' (NRSV)

The Greek sentence speaks of the second or third watch of the night. So because we do not use this method of defining the night, it is best to translate as I have done '*middle of the night or early morning*'.

Further Comments

'Little flock' (12:32)

In this passage, Jesus calls the disciples '*little flock*'. This is not the only place where Jesus uses diminutive terms to speak to the disciples. Elsewhere he says of them '*o you of little faith*' (Matt 8:26, 16:8, Luke 12:28), not to insult, but in a kindly manner. The expression '*little flock*' reminds us of Jesus' sense of purpose as the 'shepherd' of a flock, and also of the fact that he was content that His group of disciples was small. Jesus was content to reveal the most important spiritual truths to a small group of people, and allow them to carry them into the world.

'be dressed and ready and have your lamps lit' (12:35)

It is not long since Luke reported Jesus' teaching about placing a lamp on a lamp stand (Luke 11:33f.). This famous teaching is about the light of Christ in the life of the individual and the change this brings to the soul, '*the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, you whole body is full of light ...*' (11:34). His remark in this passage is surely designed to link with this recent teaching.

'Son of Man'

This is one of several places in Luke where Jesus uses this title for Himself. If you look at all the uses of this phrase, you will discover that they nearly always refer to the Messiah in one of two ways. Firstly as wielding God's authority, for example, '*the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins*' (5:24). Then secondly, as describing Jesus in His risen and ascended glory with the Father; for example, '*it will be like that on the day when the Son of Man will be revealed ...*' (17:30f.), or '*you will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power ...*' (21:27).

Our passage today contains probably the first use of the term in the second sense above, and for the rest of Luke's Gospel, we will find that Jesus uses the term in this way more and more. As He speaks, He seems to be looking into the future with prophetic eyes and seeing His destiny.

Discipleship

Application

Building up treasure in heaven - selling everything and giving it to the poor

This command of Jesus stands as a challenge to all God's people to dispose of excess wealth in favour of the poor who have the greater need. We will of course make our own judgements about how much wealth we need to live 'happily', but we also know that God is our Judge, and He is constantly looking to His own people to give redress to the poor of the world. Perhaps we will only get a right perspective on wealth when we stop thinking of any of it as 'ours' and using it as if it is 'God's'. It may then be possible to enjoy doing what we can to put Jesus' command into practice.

Sometimes, a command in Scripture like this can appear to be 'too much', but when we begin to try and put it into practice, then we find God's blessings more abundantly than we could have imagined.

Receiving from Jesus

It is good to be reminded that the Christian both serves Jesus, and is served by Jesus. This is the true reciprocity of friendship, and it is amazing that Jesus wants to be this close to us. The picture in this passage is of Jesus having a meal with the disciples after He has returned; perhaps this meal is the full experience of what we only glimpse within the communion service or 'Lord's Supper'. If this is the case, we can rejoice in anticipation of a great heavenly banquet in the presence of our Saviour. We should not be shy about the anticipation!

Jesus' return

It is worth holding on to the fact that Jesus' first mention of His return contains the command to wait and be always ready. Too much discussion in the church revolves around the issue of when the Lord will return, even though we know that we cannot know, and too little about what it means to be ready. The parables of Jesus tell us without a doubt that being ready means to be found doing the things of God, and alert to the day and to the future. It is a sobering task for us to examine our time to see how we measure up to this call.

Ideas for what to do

- Spend some time thinking about heaven. What do you think it is like? What do you imagine will be there? Look up some other passages of Scripture about 'heaven' to build up your pictures, e.g. Psalm 11:4, 73:25, 146, John 3:13f., Colossians 1:16-23, Philippians 3:20f. Hebrews 9:24f.
- Make an assessment of what you own. Practically, what could you sell so as to give the money to the poor? And which poor do you think you should give it to?

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Which teaching in this passage do you feel is the most radical? Which is the hardest to put into action?
2. How can we assess the riches we have stored up '*in heaven*' and how can this help us here on earth?
3. If it is so important, what should God's people do to be ready for His return?

Final Prayer

Thanks You Lord Jesus, for the truths You have taught us. Help us to embrace them, one by one, until we are immersed in doing the will of the Father. Fix our hearts on the things of heaven, so that we truly store up riches in heaven. AMEN
