

Last week, amongst other things, we looked at two pictures Jesus used to convey that we need to be ready for what's ahead. Through the images of a master coming home unexpectedly and a thief breaking in, Jesus implored those to whom he was speaking to be ready.

Ready for what you might ask?

1. In a narrow sense it refers to Jesus' return at the end of time as we know it.
2. In a wider sense it refers to the time when God summons us to follow him or when God plans to do something fresh in us and through us.
3. In its widest sense it's a call to prepare to meet our God whenever and wherever God chooses to reveal himself.

So the story goes on.... To live with watchful readiness and a willingness to serve the Lord is the goal; **BUT** such living does place us in opposition to the values and goals of those around us. Because as I said recently, we live among people who pretty much think this material world is where it's at and to have as big a slice of the material pie as they can get is the important thing, because it's all about them – trouble is we can so easily fall into the same way of thinking.

After these illustrations so to speak, just to check in with Jesus, Peter has a question.

41 Peter asked, 'Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?'

42 The Lord answered, 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, 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 is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

47 'The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

These are pictures through which Jesus applies truth. In a sense we are all managers of what God has given us and the major question is how would we like God to find us when he comes to us whenever and however that might be?

Possible responses:

1. With our **work done**. Billy Campbell, 'There's a work for Jesus nobody else but you can do.' **It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.** For many, life is a collection of loose ends – things not done and things half done.
2. I feel this more and more acutely as I come to the end of my years in pastoral ministry; not might I add the end of serving Jesus. And I discovered I'm not alone in this. John Keats wrote of a time in his life when **'I have fears that I may cease to be before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain.'** Interesting thought! On the other hand Jesus was able to say, **'I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.'**

3. To be at **peace with our fellow travellers**. It would be so sad to pass from this life feeling bitter towards someone or for someone to be unreconciled to someone who has gone – I've come across that often enough. So often people walk away from community because they're upset or whatever but they take that perceived upset wherever they go, it's part of them – and you know Logan's law of location – no matter where you go, there you are...
4. To be at **peace with God** – to know we're going to fall into the arms of a loving, living God, which we believe is what Elva Ball did at 2:25 on Saturday morning.

And this first part ends with quite a challenge:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Privilege brings with it responsibility; given much; entrusted with much. What we do with what we have and who we are is pretty important.

The rest of Chapter 12 contains a number of saying's that appear to be disconnected and I'm really only going to deal with one of them. The words in verses 49-53 stand over against Jesus being the Prince of peace – anything but!

49 'I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!

51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

What could the fire be? Various answers – division which connects it to later verses, holiness, faith or judgment; Judgment seems to most obvious – judgment on unbelief and if you know the history of the 1st century you'll know that the nation Jesus spoke to was demolished within 40 years of his resurrection. But it's also judgment that Jesus will bear for others – baptism here seems to refer to the Cross. And though Jesus accepted the inevitability of his suffering, nothing could make it attractive.

Verses 51-3 address the issue that Jesus isn't just meek and mild as I used to pray every night. If you've grown up or come from a family where not everybody saw Jesus as you do you've lived this out; just a reminder that following Jesus isn't all sweetness and joy – tough times are part of the deal too.

54 He said to the crowd: 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. 55 And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. 56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?

Again in a primary sense this refers to Jesus coming to earth – interpreting this present time. The wider sense is that in every season we are challenged to interpret this time in which we live. This week I downloaded a 2018 report into Faith and Belief in New Zealand, I hope we can look at some of the findings at our next church meeting so we can at least get a grasp on what we face living Christianly in our times – only a third of the people surveyed identify themselves with Christianity – down from 49% in 2006 – at least there is more honesty around in this regard.

'Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? 58 As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled on the way, or your adversary may drag you off to the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer and the officer throw you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.'

Try hard to be reconciled; kind of what we talked about before: Live reconciled to God, to one another and within ourselves - often the hardest.

There's a longer message in each division of today's passage to be sure. My intention was to cover the ground because next week's text is the beginning of Chapter 13.

Being ready, being reconciled and understanding the times in which we live are just some of the ways in which we recognise this business of following Jesus can be pretty tough.

But worth it: **Lord** as Peter said **where else can we go; you have the words that give life!**