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THERE IS NO MOTION DETECTOR  
Luke 12:35-48

I was in high school. It was near the end of the school year. It was time when in the church was abuzz with excited discussions about fulfillment of prophecy and the coming of Christ. Israel had been attacked by her Arab neighbors and inflicted on all of them a humiliating defeat in a matter of days. For the first time in centuries Israel controlled the holy city of Jerusalem. Ancient prophecies were being fulfilled right before our eyes, and for many it seemed a near certainty that the last days had arrived, the rapture of the church was about to happen. Even as a teenager who didn't know much and was mostly paying attention to other things, I was infected with that sense that maybe Armageddon was just around the corner.

In the late spring in Bakersfield there was no May gray or June gloom. That time of year summer had arrived. It was typically hot and dry, the sort of weather Bakersfield is known for. Normally cloudless skies were the rule. But that year was not a normal year. The days were hot, but in the evenings we were experiencing something I'd never seen before. We had lightning storms off in the distance. There was no rain, just at night I could see lightning and hear thunder. It was an odd and for me unsettling experience. One evening I came home after dark. The first unusual thing I encountered was that the house was unlocked. My parents never left doors unlocked. I walked into the house and was surprised to find that lights were on but no one seemed to be there. I went into the kitchen and found food cooking, but no one was around. I called out, went through the house, went into the garage, went to the backyard, but no one was there. There were no notes telling me where everyone was. They were just gone. Mom and dad should have been home. They didn't tell me they would be gone, and the look of the kitchen was that they had been in the middle of preparing dinner when they had just vanished. Then it hit me. I'd been left behind! Somehow the rapture of the church had happened, and I was left. I had a bad few minutes there as I contemplated the state of my eternal soul. Then mom and dad showed up. They'd just gone next door to visit with our neighbors, the Ottos. What a relief.

I remember that experience now as a bit humorous. Was I being gullible and silly? Were those just the irrational fears of a callow teenager? Was it absurd to be concerned about Jesus coming back? Let's look at what Jesus himself had to say about that in Luke 12:35-48.

## JESUS IS COMING BACK

This passage could be viewed as three different parables. I think however that Jesus had one main idea in mind here and what he gives are two aspects of the same parable with an illustration included. The main idea of the entire passage is verse 40. “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” If you grasp that simple idea, you understand what Jesus is saying.

The term “Son of Man” was from a well-known prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14 where Daniel saw a “Son of Man” coming with the clouds of heaven and being given authority over all nations, a kingdom that would never end. All Jews understood this Son of Man was the divine Messiah who would rule over all the earth. Some of Jesus’ listeners assumed he was merely saying they did not know when Messiah was going to come but that they should be ready.

Yet those familiar with Jesus knew he used that expression for himself. What did he mean by talking about his coming? He was already there. It appears that Peter was confused by Jesus’ words. In verse 41 Peter asked if Jesus was talking to the disciples or to the crowd as a whole. He and the other disciples had obviously been ready for Jesus to come because they had received him when he began his ministry publicly. So clearly this message wasn’t for them. Yet note in verse 22 when this discussion started Luke tells us “Jesus said to his disciples...” He was talking to the disciples, yet the message seemed aimed at those in the crowd who were not Jesus’ disciples yet. They were the ones who needed to be ready for his coming. So Peter, seeing that Jesus seemed to be talking to the disciples yet saying something that was appropriate for the crowd who had not yet committed to following him, asks for clarification. He’s asking, “Uh, are you talking to them or to us?”

What no one in the crowd understood was that Jesus was saying both that he was the Son of Man and that he would someday come in the clouds to set up an eternal kingdom. The part they had no idea about was that Jesus was going to come *again*. This seemingly humble woodworker from Galilee was going to leave this planet, but would come back. I’m pretty sure the disciples were confused about this until after Jesus had risen from the dead and later ascended into heaven. At that point they probably slapped themselves on the forehead and said, “Oh, I get it now. He’s gone, but he’s going to come back. That’s what we’re supposed to be ready for!”

This message that Jesus was going to come back is consistent in the New Testament. The night Jesus was arrested he was put on trial before the Jewish high priest. The priest asked him point blank if he was the Messiah. Matthew 26:64 says

his response was “Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Acts 1:11 tells us that when Jesus left the planet he just flew up into the sky. His disciples by that time were used to being amazed by the things Jesus did, but this one was a real stunner. They’re standing there with their mouths hanging open, trying to understand what they’d just seen when angels suddenly showed up. The angels said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?” Now if I’d been there I think I would have interrupted them right there. Why are we looking into the sky? Are you kidding me? Did you see that? Jesus just got sucked up into the clouds. Where did he go? What’s he doing? Is he coming right back?

Before the disciples could start peppering them with questions the angels went on. “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” He will come back. Be ready. In Philippians 3:20 Paul wrote, “Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul wrote, “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.” In Revelation 1:7 John wrote of Jesus Christ, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” Jesus Christ is not gone forever, but will come again.

Seriously? You believe that Jesus Christ is going to come back? It’s been 2000 years since he lived. All those Christians like Paul and John and Peter thought Jesus was going to come back while they were alive. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians, “We who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord.” He thought he’d be alive when Jesus came back. He was wrong! He’s had lots of company. I encountered one person who wrote on an internet site, “Jesus: Dead 2000 years ago. Dead today, dead tomorrow, dead the day after tomorrow. I know fairy tales are fun, but Jesus Christ? People, grow up.” Easy to understand why he might think that. Why should we believe that Jesus will indeed come back at some point?

One of the arguments Christians have used to encourage people to believe Jesus will come back is the Hal Lindsey approach. Look how what is happening in the world lines up with what the Bible predicts. The Jews are back in Israel since 1948. The gospel is being preached in all the world. Jesus said there would be many earthquakes, famines and wars before he came back and we see that happening.

Sure enough, see how many killer quakes there have been recently. The geopolitical scene is lining up just as the Bible said. The Arab nations are all joining together in their opposition of Israel, the European Union is kind of like a resurrection of the old Roman Empire just like Daniel predicted. Now some prophecy wonks are saying it is Iran that is depicted as leading the charge against Israel just before Jesus comes back, and sure enough, that's happening now.

This is not a good reason for believing that Jesus will come back. In the 1960's and 1970's it seemed to many to be a near certainty that Jesus would come back soon because there were 10 nations in the European Common Market. It looked like the reconstituted Roman Empire that Daniel pictured and the Soviet Union was an ominous perfect fit for Magog from Ezekiel 38-39, the nation that would lead the attack by a coalition of nations on Israel. But then Common Market expanded into the European Economic Community with 27 members and the Soviet Union imploded. And the antichrist did not turn out to be Breshnev, Gorbachev, Khomeini, Kissinger, Clinton or any other of the ridiculous suggestions that have been suggested. For a while I thought it might be Al Davis of the Oakland Raiders, but we can now rule that one out too. I read one person's claim that it's Bill Gates. That one might have some merit.

Here's what we put our faith in: Jesus Christ rose from the dead and is still alive. He proved he was indeed the Son of God. Therefore when he says he will come back at some point we can absolutely trust that promise because God does not lie and always keeps his promises. The Word of God is true and stands forever. We trust that, not someone's theories about how everything today matches up perfectly with their concept of the prophetic scheme in the Bible. People have been lining up events in their day with prophecy for 2000 years, and they've always been wrong.

But it's been such a long time. Yes, I suppose it has, for us. But it hasn't been for God. Have you ever read 2 Peter? In 3:4 Peter wrote, "They will say, 'where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" In Peter's lifetime, within 30 years of the life of Jesus skeptics were saying, "Well where is he? He's not coming back and you're waiting in vain." Peter answered in verses 8-9 "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise."

Imagine a tape measure going all the way across the front of the room. Now imagine that tape being extended from here all the way to the Atlantic coast in Florida. Let that stand in as a picture of eternity. It's not a totally accurate picture

since eternity has no beginning or end. Now envision someone using a black marker to put an ink mark on that tape measure somewhere in Texas. Compared to eternity that small mark would be an accurate representation of 2000 years. So when God, who is eternal views 2000 years he sees it as just a blip.

Our problem is that we're like little kids who are so excited because grandpa and grandma are coming to visit and going to take us all to Disneyland. The kids can hardly stand to wait. They cry out, "when will they get here?" because they want them to come so badly. The parents say, "They'll be here soon." For the kids that means some time in the next 10 minutes, but the parents mean next week. When they tell the kids its next week they don't really understand how long that is. That's our problem when Jesus says he will return soon. We think that means in the next 10 minutes because we don't comprehend an eternal view of life.

#### NO ONE ON EARTH KNOWS THE ETA

Now we get to the parable. In this brief little story a man who has a number of servants has gone to a wedding feast. I have been at some long, drawn out wedding events that felt like I had two birthdays before they were over. However, wedding feasts in ancient Israel made the longest one I've ever been to pale in comparison. They lasted for days. In this story it is important for his servants to be ready when the master comes back, no matter what the time. He says they should have the lights on and they should be dressed and alert, ready to respond.

There is some interesting terminology in verse 36. It says that we should be like servants waiting for the Master to "break away" from the wedding. The word suggests that the wedding celebration is in full swing but somewhat unexpectedly the Master decides to leave. In other words, they might be anticipating that he will be gone several more days, but they should be ready the entire time. In fact in verse 38 it says the servants should be ready even if he comes home in the second or third watch, which would be the middle of the night.

Jesus is making the point that he is going to come back, and we, his servants, don't know when that's going to happen. It will be as much of a surprise as the master showing up in the middle of the night when the wedding feast was still in full swing and he normally wouldn't leave it. So because we don't know when he is coming we should be ready at every moment.

Verse 39 is an illustration. "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." I've been thinking of switching our cable tv provider because ours, Time Warner, is the only

system that can't manage to carry the Padres games. If I switch the new company will make an appointment to install their system by saying something like, "we will be at your home on Thursday between 8 A. M. and noon." Thieves don't work like that. Wouldn't it be nice if thieves called you up and said, "we plan to be at your home on Wednesday sometime between 8 and 12 in the morning. We would like you to be out of the house during that time." They don't do that. When a thief comes it is always a surprise. I have been the victim of thieves four times in my life and every time it was a big surprise. I never expected it to happen.

Jesus says that's how his coming will be. In Matthew 24:36 he says of the time of his coming again, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." We will not be expecting it and suddenly, shockingly, he will arrive.

There are people today who insist that the signs prove that Christ is about to come back. Some have made a lot of money selling books and speaking, in their talks explaining how everything in current events matches up with prophecies in the Bible about the return of Jesus to this world. However, people who say that are part of a tribe that has a long history. Tichonus, 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian writer, was certain Jesus was going to come back in 381. In the 1530's Anabaptists took over the German town of Munster and expelled all other groups anticipating the arrival of Jesus immediately. The great scientist and mathematician Isaac Newton figured Christ would come in 1715. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century William Miller, founder of the Adventist movement predicted Jesus would come back in October, 1844. In my lifetime it's been Hal Lindsey sort of implying it would be within 40 years of 1948 when Israel became a nation again. It's been Edward Whisenunt predicting 1988, Whisenunt again predicting 1989. A group in Australia said Jesus would come back in 1991. Harold Camping predicted 1994, then later 2011. All wrong.

Some object that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 says, "Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you. For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and so they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief." See, Paul says it shouldn't surprise us. We should know about times and dates and shouldn't be caught by surprise.

That sounds like it makes sense. But what Paul meant in that passage was because we are children of God we know the truth, and the truth is that Jesus could come at any time, so we should be prepared *all* the time. Here is what the presumed

prophecy experts always forget: Jesus' and Paul's instruction applied equally to their audience in the first century, to readers when Rome fell, to believers in the Dark Ages, during the time of the Reformation, to readers in the new nation of American in 1776, to readers in the turmoil of world wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to readers today, and if the Lord should wait, readers 100 years from now. No follower of Jesus should ever be surprised. They should always be ready. The world doesn't think Christ will come back and will be shocked. But Christians should be expecting his return at any time therefore should not be surprised.

So the point is be ready for Jesus to show up. But what must we do to be ready for Jesus's coming? Verse 42 points us in the direction we should look. "Who then is the faithful and wise manager?" Jesus uses the idea of a servant who manages others. He is entrusted with the master's resources. He should use them as intended. Give the food that has been allotted to the other servants to those for whom it was intended. Take care of the other servants. Don't abuse them, don't use the master's resources for whatever you please. In other words, be faithful!

The final verses in the story are kind of stern. What will happen to a servant who is found to be unfaithful, who is misusing or abusing the resources entrusted to him? The master will punish him severely and "assign him a place with the unbelievers." This is a warning that God will deal with unfaithful people who have decided life is about themselves and they will never have to answer to a God who seems to be absent. The point is the way to be ready is to be faithful each and every day to use the resources God has entrusted to us the way he wants us to use them and for us to do each day faithfully what God has called us to do.

### APPLICATION

#### UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD IS LIKE

A general principle of interpreting parables is that they are stories told to illustrate one main idea. They are not intended to be pressed at every point but to help us see the big idea. However, there are exceptions to every rule, and this passage contains an exception.

Jesus did something in this parable that was so unusual it had to be intentional. He said something that was completely at odds with his culture, something that would have grabbed the attention of his hearers. They would not have missed it. In verse 37 he says, "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."

Everything else Jesus said in this passage was consistent with the experience of people in his society. Servants wait on a master. They should be faithful to him even when he is away so when he returns he will find them doing what he has given them to do. If they are unfaithful he will punish them. What absolutely didn't fit with his culture was that the master would return from a wedding feast and would take it upon himself to have his servants sit at a table while he served them.

That was astounding. It was a total reversal. It was unheard of in that day. Masters just didn't do that. Imagine if one of the most popular people in our society, say Taylor Swift, shows up at the home of the person who takes care of her landscaping and proceeds to mow his lawn. Such a thing would be shocking. That's how shocking this statement of Jesus would have been in his society.

This was deliberate on Jesus' part. So why did he say that? He's saying something about the character of the Master. It is a complete reversal from what we expect. In Mark 10:45 Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." We have a God who cares so much about us that he gave himself up to serve us. This is the God we await. This is a powerful statement about the character of our Lord Jesus. It says he is almost unbelievably humble and unselfish. He upsets all that we know or think about someone who is great and powerful. He is the Messiah who gets on his knees and washes the feet of his own disciples. He serves because he loves.

He loves us, which means we need not fear his coming. His arrival will be a thing of joy for those who believe in him because he loves us he wants to do good for us. When I was young I was sure Jesus was going to come back within a few years. I wasn't real happy about it. I kind of liked life the way it was, and there were lots of things I wanted to experience in this life, so I really didn't want Jesus to come back. I have changed. Yes I'm old now and have experienced a lot of those things and the road ahead of me goes downhill at an accelerating pace. But that's not really it. There are still a lot of things I'd love to do and experience in this life. But I now have a clearer understand of how amazing Jesus is, and of how incredible is his desire to have us experience joy. He will come to serve us, as he always has and to bring us joy. Whatever we think we want in this life, we will experience is true fullness and goodness only when Jesus comes back.

## REORIENT YOUR THINKING

Sadly most of the time we give assent to the coming of Jesus, but we don't expect it. Jesus could come back today. This is not a fairy tale. Every day when we get up it could be the last day we have before Jesus shows up. We need to think with that



kind of reality. The point is not that we should sell everything we have or we should go sit on a hill some place waiting for Jesus to appear. The point is that we should live each day as though this is it. Today I want to be ready and living in such a way that if Jesus shows up I'll be happy to see him.

In Philippians 3:20 Paul said, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." Note the first word, "but." It's a contrast with people whose mind is on earthly things. Their hearts are obsessed with this world. Paul says we should be people who eagerly await Jesus. We're not just waiting, we're *eagerly* waiting.

I have this quirk in my personality. I love trains. I hardly ever ride on them now, but every time I see one my heart kind of leaps a little. My pulse picks up when we go by the train station downtown. It goes back to when I was a kid. My parents took my brother and me on several occasions on train trips across the country to visit our grandparents in Cleveland. It was 3 days in a coach car! We road on the Santa Fe Railroad's Southwest Chief that took us across the country to Chicago. There we boarded the New York Central's Twentieth Century Limited that took us the remainder of the way to Cleveland. I know now it must have been arduous for my parents, but for Jerry and me it was Adventure with a capital A. We loved everything about it. Neither one of us ever got over it. I remember being at the train station in Bakersfield waiting for the train to come. We were so excited we could hardly stand still. We would stand at the very edge of the platform straining to look up the tracks to the north, hoping to be the first to catch a glimpse of the arriving train. We could hardly contain ourselves. We were eagerly awaiting the arrival of that train. Paul says we should eagerly await Jesus' coming every day!

When the Master comes it's going to be the best thing you ever imagined. Titus 2:13 says, "we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." It is a blessed hope, the best hope we could have. Yes, better than a train trip. Better than chocolate. Better than Hawaii. This passage reminds us to live with this reality. When we do it can infuse every day with excitement, possibility, hope, enthusiasm and meaning because this could be the day! When I am doing some menial thing today, it could be the thing I will be doing when Jesus the Lord shows up. I want to be doing it to the best of my ability with joy and enthusiasm should he arrive.

#### BE EVER READY

Because Jesus could come back at any moment you had better be ready for him. First and foremost, that means making sure that he will, in fact, come to serve you,

not to punish you. That begins with making sure you are in right relation to him. Romans 10:9 says, “if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Put your faith in the risen Jesus, the Lord of all, then be willing to admit, confess that he is your Lord.

Then the best way to be ready is to be faithful to him today. Remember the near hysteria of the days following 9/11? There was fear that we were going to be hit again by some devastating terror attack. Then in 2004 there were the terrible attacks in Madrid on the railroads. Once again we felt vulnerable. Two months later on May 5, 2004, a conductor for the transit authority in Philadelphia spotted something near the tracks close to Philly’s huge 30<sup>th</sup> street station. It appeared to be some sort of electronic device by the tracks in the commuter rail yard. Homeland Security was called and FBI agents were soon swarming the area. They found a mysterious transmitter attached to a motion detector. Tension mounted as they feared some explosive device would be found attached to a receiver nearby. However, a train mechanic stepped forward and sheepishly admitted he had installed the device. He was not a terrorist nor was he a disgruntled employee seeking revenge. He worked the graveyard shift. He installed the motion detector and rigged it so it would trigger an alarm in his work area when his supervisor approached. That way he could safely nap and when the device sounded he could get up and look busy by the time the boss arrived.

This passage reminds us there is no detector that will sound the alarm when Jesus is on his way. The only way we can be prepared is to be faithful each and every day. Walk in his presence today. Live in his grace and joy. Strive to bless others. Love those around you and use your gifts and resources to serve him so that if today Jesus should show up he will pat you on the back and say, “Way to go. You’re doing just what I wanted you to do.”