

Sermon Text: Luke 12:35-40 ³⁵ " Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; ³⁶ "and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. ³⁷ "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. ³⁸ "And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹ "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Sermon Theme: Be Like Those Waiting for Their Lord

1. With our lamps burning
2. With our loins girded

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, whose second and final coming to this world we eagerly look forward to as children of the heavenly Father, dear fellow redeemed;

One of the joyful experiences in this temporal world is a wedding. This event gives us joy, because in the sacred institution of marriage God unites a man and a woman together in a life long union as husband and wife.

Following the wedding service, ordinarily there is a wedding banquet where the newly formed marriage is celebrated. Besides partaking of a special meal, the celebrants have opportunity to share with the gathering of family and friends their happiness and thankfulness over God blessing the couple with each other.

Being mindful of how important and how very special the wedding celebration is to us, Jesus made use of this joyous occasion to picture in a symbolic way the future blissful life in heaven. He uses the familiar scene of the happy celebration of the closest and most intimate lifelong relationship in this world to direct our attention to that ultimate and most perfect relationship in the world to come of the saints of heaven with one another and with God that will continue throughout all eternity.

When comparing the earthly wedding celebration with the heavenly one, a significant difference is that with the earthly one we know the exact day and time it will begin, whereas with the heavenly one we are not told by God when it will start. Both the day and time of our death and the day and time of Judgment Day is not revealed to us. There's a good reason for this. Being aware of the spiritual struggles we have with our sinful flesh and the powerful enticements and allurements in this world to forsake God and His ways, the Lord in His infinite wisdom and great love for us chose not to inform us when we will depart from this world. For if we knew the time of our departure, we could well be tempted to squander our time in the days leading up to our final end with

selfish, worldly, profligate and wicked living.

There is a warning sound in our text with Jesus' use of an illustration of a thief coming unexpectedly to rob and plunder. He said, "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into." Since thieves do not let us know ahead of time when they plan to break into our house and rob us, as householders we always need to be prepared. In a somewhat similar line of thought, even as the thief comes unannounced so also the coming of the day of the Lord. Since we do not know the final day or hour of this world, we need to continually keep a close and careful watch over our spiritual health and welfare. It is eternally critical to do this so that we are not found unprepared when Jesus finally comes and lose our place in heaven.

To the end that we are found waiting and well prepared for the coming of our Lord on Judgment Day, we find Jesus exhorting us saying, "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning." The imagery of these two pictures symbolically portray the spiritual readiness of a child of God for the coming of the Day of the Lord.

The second of these two pictures, that of having one's lamp burning when the master returns from the wedding for his servants, is very much like the imagery Jesus used in His parable of the ten virgins. You may recall that in Jesus telling of this parable He spoke of ten virgins waiting for the coming of the bridegroom so that they could accompany him to the wedding banquet. Since he would be coming sometime during the evening hours, as was the custom for Jewish weddings, they each would need burning lamps in order to go along with the bridegroom. Jesus tells of five wise virgins who had an extra supply of oil so they could keep their lamps burning until the bridegroom arrived. Whereas the other five virgins are referred to as foolish, because they didn't make provisions for enough oil to keep their lamps burning. So then, when the bridegroom finally arrived, only five could go to the wedding festivities, while the other five were prevented from going.

The burning lamp is a picture of our possessing a true and living faith in Jesus Christ. This spirit of heart is of absolute necessity if we are to have a part in that future eternal life of blissful celebration in heaven. For as we have learned from little on it is through faith in Jesus' shed blood and righteousness that we are enabled to lay hold of God's gift of eternal salvation.

In order that our lamp of faith might be kept burning our Lord has provided us with an ample supply of oil by placing His revealed word in our hands to read and meditate on, and by bringing us into a Christian fellowship in which we can hear the preaching and teaching of God's Word, receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, as well as study and discuss the Word of God with fellow Christians. Through our use of the Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit fuels our faith, as He broadens our understanding and causes our belief in the teachings of our Savior to grow and flourish.

When we hear Jesus telling us to 'let your lamps be burning,' He is reminding us and encouraging us to make diligent and faithful of His Word and Sacrament so that saving faith can be kept vibrant and alive in our hearts. So then, as we hear Jesus say 'let

your lamps be burning,' we need to ask ourselves whether we have been like the five wise virgins or the five foolish ones. Have we been regular in using the Bible in our homes? In our church life, has it been high on our list of priorities to take advantage of the various opportunities to get together with fellow Christians around the Word of God to hear, study, and discuss the teachings of our Savior God?

In addition to this self-examination, there is another important matter that needs our attention. It has to do with our response to the Word of God. When the law of God has been brought to bear upon our lives exposing the sin that is in us, have we in each case been willing to acknowledge our sin, repent of it with a sorrowful spirit, and turn away from continuing to live in it? Has there been a transgression we committed in the past considered by us to be so dreadful that we are unable to believe God would ever forgive us for it? If either of these two spiritual problems were to be found in us, it is crucial that they be resolved with the help of God. The lamp of faith is found burning in our hearts when the Holy Spirit works repentance in our hearts concerning known sins and faith to believe that Jesus' redemptive work has removed the guilt of all our sins. As we read and hear the Word of God, pray that the Holy Spirit work true repentance and faith in our hearts, and thus keep the lamp of faith burning in us.

The other picture Jesus uses in our text that shows a ready spirit for the coming of the day of the Lord is found in His exhortation to "let your waist be girded." To understand Jesus' intended meaning here, it is helpful to know the Jewish dress in that day. In that period of time it was customary for the Jews to wear long flowing outer garments. Because of their length whenever they planned to go on a journey or work in the fields, they pulled up their garment a ways and tied a belt around it at their waist. By doing this their clothing wouldn't get in the way and cause them to trip.

The practice of girding one's waist reminds us of preparations the children of Israel made in their exodus from Egypt and their travel to the promised land of Canaan. On the eve of their departure from Egypt, the Israelites girded their waist so that they could leave unhindered at a moments notice. In a symbolic way this pictures for us the Lord's instruction to be ready for our departure from this world at any time and go to the promised land of heaven. The girding of the waist could then be picturing for us the need to remove the many hindrances that stand in the way of being ready for the great day of our Lord. Such hindrances could include the cares and pleasures of this world that can preoccupy our time, attention, and affection to the point that we do not give time, attention, and affection to the spiritual things of the kingdom of God. Other hindrances to guard against so that they don't trip us up are the flawed human philosophies of listening to and following our human emotions or to do whatever we think will make us feel happy. Such ways can be very deceptive and result in drawing us away from the Lord and His ways, and cause us to be unprepared for His coming.

Another likely meaning behind the exhortation to gird our waists is that of devoting ourselves to faithfully live in service of God. We give evidence of a true and living faith when we willingly live according to God's holy will and seek to advance His kingdom.

As imperfect children of God, we realize we haven't always been so faithful in keeping God's commandments and in serving Him in His kingdom. But we thank God that He has mercy on us and forgives us for Jesus' sake so that our failings don't prevent us from finally entering the eternal kingdom of glory.

Our Scripture text not only speaks of devoting our lives to God, but it also speaks of the service Jesus will perform for us in eternity. In verse 37 we read of this, "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them." Ordinarily, when the master returns to his servants, the servants are expected to wait on and serve the master. However, in the picture Jesus presents in His parable, He tells of it being the other way around. When Jesus comes to bring us into heaven, He will be serving us in eternity by blessing us with a glorious, blissful, and perfect existence in that wondrous new world. And then, we in turn will be serving the Lord night and day in delightful work with great joy and gladness of heart.

When we think of what Jesus, our Lord and Savior, lovingly did in service to us during His earthly stay for our eternal redemption and also what He will be eternally doing in service to us in the future life of heaven, does this not fill our hearts with love for our Savior and spur us on to commit our lives anew to Him, and to spread abroad the gospel message of salvation, and to do all that we can in service to Him in His kingdom here on earth.

As we look forward to the day when Jesus will come to usher us into the heavenly wedding banquet where we will be celebrating with perfect joy eternally, may the Lord help us to be like those waiting for their Lord with our lamps burning brightly and our waists girded. Amen.