

# The Gospel According to Luke

## **“Steward Little”**

Chapter 12:35-48

### Introduction

You’ve read the want ads, looking for a job. You go to the classifieds; you find the Help Wanted section; then you start scanning the titles for a position that sounds promising. Some jobs require little or no experience; but most of them list the prerequisites necessary before you can be considered.

I want you to think of our text in Luke’s Gospel as if you were reading a want ad – *because that is essentially what it is!* You learn, in verse forty-two and forty-three, that Jesus is advertising for **faithful and wise steward[s], whom [He] will make ruler over his household... when He comes**. The job title is **steward**, and it is a position that will become open when Jesus returns from heaven to earth to set-up His kingdom on the earth. A **steward**, in the Bible, was a servant who was promoted to a position of authority and responsibility over the household. It was a management position, an administrative position.

You and I, if we are Christians, are servants in the Lord’s household on earth – the Church. When He returns to earth, and we return with Him, it is His desire we all be promoted to stewards, to aid and assist Him in governing His kingdom on earth.

You will be automatically considered for promotion. But there are *prerequisites* to being promoted to steward; and, before your promotion, there will be a review of your *performance* as a servant, while waiting for the Lord to return.

These verses, like any good want ad, list those prerequisites and performance. We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Have Prerequisites To Satisfy Before You Can Be Promoted From

Servant To Steward, and #2 You Will Have A Performance Review Before You Can Be Promoted From Servant To Steward.

#1 You Have Prerequisites To Satisfy  
Before You Can Be Promoted From Servant To Steward  
(v35-40)

These first few verses, verses thirty-five through forty, are addressed to servants whose Master is gone away. The manner in which they conduct themselves in their Master's absence are the prerequisites that will be considered when He returns to promote them to stewards.

There is a big prerequisite before we even begin to look at the verses. To be a servant, you must have a B.A. degree; but in our case, B.A. stands for *Born Again!*

If you're born-again, you are a servant on earth while Jesus is in heaven. You should be occupied with at least three activities: *working, waiting, and watching.*

You have the privilege of working:

Luke 12:35 "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning;

Everyone wore long, flowing outer garments – like robes. When you were busy working as a servant, you had to **gird**-up your outer garment by tucking it in to your belt at the **waist**.

One of the duties of a servant was to keep the household **lamps burning**, by refilling the oil and trimming the wick. Jesus is describing a scenario in which the servant didn't even go to sleep, because his master might come home at any moment; so the **lamps** needed constant attention.

There is a lot we could say about working for the Lord. Two things struck me about this particular example Jesus used:

1. First – Your **waist** is to be constantly **girded**. In their culture, that would represent that there were no breaks; no lunch hours; no weekends off; no vacations. Does that mean we are to work like

dogs, burning ourselves out? No, it indicates that your work for the Lord is such a privilege that you'd rather be doing it than anything else! It's not like work, because you do it for love.

2. Second – They tended the **lamps**. It was simple, but mundane and monotonous. But it was what they were called upon to accomplish. You are not really called upon to do great things; the things you are called upon to do are great, because they are for Jesus!

Next, we see that you have the priority of waiting:

**Luke 12:36** 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.

In their case, the Master of the house was gone to a **wedding** celebration. These could last up to a week; they had no idea when their Master would return home. They had to wait, and to wait-up, for His return.

Do you like waiting? Waiting in line? I don't think you do. Often, if the wait is going to be too long, you leave, and go elsewhere...  
*Where you wait some more!*

Ah, but what if it's something you really desire? People will wait in line for hours, days – even weeks – for certain events, or to see certain people. Jeff Tweiten lives on a periwinkle blue, fold-out futon on the sidewalk in front of the Cinerama Theatre in Seattle. He's camping out for 139 days - waiting for *Star Wars: Episode III -- Revenge of the Sith* to open.

Isn't Jesus worth waiting, and waiting-up, for? Ever see, or participate in, a line-party? **Think of your time on earth as a line-party!**

Next, we see that you have the problem of watching:

**Luke 12:37** 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.

Luke 12:38 And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.

The Jews divided the night and early morning into three periods, called **watches**. Jesus was suggesting that servants, waiting for their Master to return, should be as diligent as a night watchman.

Then Jesus added something precious: The Master would **gird himself**, and **serve** the servants! This was unheard of in their culture; but it is the standard for the Christian culture of the Church. Jesus came to serve you. If He served, and serves, you – how much more should we selflessly serve one another.

I said watching could be a problem, and that is because of verses thirty-nine and forty:

Luke 12:39 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.

Luke 12:40 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

If you have the kind of Master who is gracious and merciful, one who serves you, it's easy to slack-off. You might quit watching for Him – *knowing He'll forgive you*. One of the many problems with slacking-off is that there is also an enemy on the loose who you need to be watching-out for. There are spiritual thieves who seek to rob and destroy you – the world, your flesh, and the devil. If you are not watching for the Lord, you will not be watching for them; and you risk spiritual peril.

There you have it: Three simple, but important, prerequisites that will be considered when Jesus returns to promote you from servant to steward. The kingdom of heaven on earth will be a great endeavor; you will want to be working in it; you will want to be a steward. Make no mistake: **Jesus wants to promote you!** He wants to reward you with more service, to fulfill your joy and give you the things your heart truly desires.

At this point, Peter interrupted, saying,

Luke 12:41 Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable *only* to us, or to all *people*?”

Peter understood that Jesus was talking about promoting servants, and it troubled him. He, and the other disciples, were always worried about their prominence, about their position, in the coming kingdom. They thought that by virtue of being ‘the twelve,’ they would automatically have the inside track on promotions in the kingdom. So Peter wanted to know if Jesus was going to open it up to others. It gave Jesus a chance to enhance His teaching. We learn, in these next verses,

#2 You Will (Also) Have A Performance Review  
Before You Can Be Promoted From Servant To Steward  
(v41-48)

Let me say a word about your performance review. You cannot attain salvation by your works. You do not maintain your salvation by your works. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Period.

**After** you are saved, you are enabled by the indwelling Holy Spirit to discover and perform good works. If you like catchy sayings, here’s a famous one to help you understand the relationship between faith and works: *Faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone*. In other words, if you have your B.A. degree, you will manifest and maintain good works. Works are a byproduct of your salvation.

The remaining verses in our study are tough. Commentators and scholars are all over the place trying to interpret them. At issue is whether or not Jesus is addressing believers; and, if He is, can they lose or forfeit eternal life by their poor performance as His servants.

I see them like this:

1. Verses forty-two through forty-four definitely describe **Christians** – those who have been saved by grace alone through faith alone.
2. Verses forty-five through forty-eight describe **unbelievers**. They may be among believers, even serving in the Church; they may be

very religious. But Jesus' review will reveal them as lost sinners who are headed to Hell.

First we have Jesus' performance review of believers:

Luke 12:42 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?*

In other words, How do you get promoted from servant to steward at the return of Jesus to the earth?

Luke 12:43 Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

Luke 12:44 Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

All you have to be **doing** are the simple things a servant normally does: work, wait, and watch. Just be a Christian, in love with the Lord, and He will promote you.

Wait a minute: Isn't Jesus going to review each individual believer at His reward seat? And won't some believers have little or no reward, because they've been blowing it?

Yep! That's true... **But even the Christian who has little or no reward will be saved, and enter the kingdom on earth in some position as a steward.**

The thing to think about is this: If you are listening to this, and think, *"Hey! That's great! I'm gonna slack-off, and just barely get in."* Well, if that's your thinking, you've got a real problem. If you can think that, and despise the love of God for you through Jesus, you'd better think again about whether you are truly born-again.

The gracious truth is, Jesus will overlook a lot of failure and faithlessness in all of our lives. If you want to check me on this, read Hebrews Chapter Eleven. In that chapter, called by some the *Hall of Faith*, you have a list of the so-called Heroes of Faith. Some of them were real losers; Samson, for example (Hebrews 11:32). But God, through His grace and by His mercy, covers their sin, and lists them with fatherly pride.

Among those who profess to know Jesus, there will be many unbelievers who cannot pass the performance review. They are the subject of the remaining verses:

Luke 12:45 But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,

Luke 12:46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the unbelievers.

Luke 12:47 And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

Luke 12:48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

The language is so straightforward that it must be describing those who end up being punished in Hell:

1. The first servant, even though he's in the Master's house, is an indulgent abuser. He's living independent of any fear of the Lord. He's definitely not aware that Jesus is present in His life; and he's not watching for the Lord's return. He is **cut** in **two**; we could say he is *dismembered*. Interesting word: He was never a *member* of the true Church and, so, at the Lord's coming, he will be *dis-membered* and treated as the unbeliever he always was.
2. The next two servants had different levels of understanding, but they, too, fell short of being saved. Their destiny, of being **beaten** with **many** or **few stripes**, is that of a person in Hell. The Bible does speak of degrees of punishment in Hell – as if just being in Hell wasn't punishment enough! So I have to see these guys as unbelievers, too.

There are people in every Church that are not saved. They've never been born-again. They serve in their Church – in some cases, even as its leaders or teachers. It is these whom Jesus was – and is – addressing.

You cannot survive Jesus' performance review as an unbeliever. Unless He is your Savior; unless you have confessed yourself a sinner; you'll be lost for eternity.

### Applying The Word

I want us to think, for just a moment, about Jesus serving you – as He portrayed Himself in the parable.

If you are a **believer**... Your Christian life is a labor of love. Jesus labored in love for you, taking on human flesh and dying on the Cross. Whatever you do for Him ought to flow from love, be a labor of love.

Look honestly at yourself: Have you become lazy? Not doing very much for the Lord? Or, maybe you are on the verge of quitting, because your work has become too hard?

Either extreme is an indication you have left your first love, because your life and its work is no longer a labor of love. The solution is not to immediately commit to some new service for the Lord; or to quit serving Him. The solution is to meet with Jesus, to rekindle your first love.

Maybe you are **not a believer**; you've never been born-again... Jesus served you by dying on the Cross. He took your place; He took upon Himself your sins; all the while, asking His Father in heaven to forgive you. There is no work you can accomplish that can save you – except to believe in Jesus.