

Russell Kelfer

Watch!

#1366-A

Series: The Parables of Scripture

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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A semi-patient father was trying to teach Brad, his totally impatient son how to wait on God. The boy wanted a new wristwatch. He had lost his through carelessness at football practice after school. Dad explained how waiting for something made it special. The boy countered with how being late because you didn't have a watch was worse. Every time the subject came up, the atmosphere got a little more tense, and Dad was not about to give in. It got to the point where every time there was a break in the conversation, the boy would say something about a watch.

One day, in desperation, the irritated father told his son to search the Scriptures for principles and promises that might help him understand just what God was doing and how to approach Him properly for a solution. The next morning, the family gathered for devotionals, and Dad decided to let everyone share the verses God had laid on their hearts. Dad began,

Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of
God, ye might receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:36)

It was Brad's turn next. Without so much as a moment of hesitation, he quoted Mark 13:37:

And what I say unto you, I say unto all: watch.

(Mark 13:37)

He may have missed the point, but you have to give him credit for creativity. Watch. What a word. To the lad, it meant a 21-jewel timepiece. To the disciples, it meant an atmosphere of expectancy. What does it mean to you?

Your answer to that question may well determine your sense of excitement as the second hand of the clock of history continues

Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly "hear" his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It's been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that's a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you "hear" as you read.

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to approach the end of the age. Watch? Watch, indeed.

Jesus desperately wanted His followers to catch a glimpse of the last days. He wanted them to exist in such an atmosphere of expectancy that they would literally live their lives on their tip-toes, peering excitedly into the realm of eternity. He wanted this life to be lived in the light of the next; He wanted priorities and goals to be established without compromise, knowing that only what was laid up as treasures in heaven would last.

Even in those three wonderful years, however, when He walked this earth ministering, the concept was difficult for the disciples to understand. This kingdom of this world they could feel, touch, and influence. The kingdom which was to come was distant, unreal, and left somewhat to the imagination. This kingdom required work. That kingdom required faith. This kingdom gave immediate gratification, acclaim, and rewards. The next only promised crowns of righteousness. They weren't something you could see on television or reach out and touch. That was harder to grasp. To be willing to wait for eternity seemed to require waiting that seemed like eternity, and most men and women did not seem to want that. Like Brad, they wanted what they wanted now and they needed it now. Or so it seemed.

Because all of the basic decisions in life would be made consciously or unconsciously based on our concepts of Christ's return, Jesus spent a great deal of His time trying to communicate it in ways that His followers could grasp. He often put it in story form, telling parables that, on the surface, seemed to be tales about servants and a master or of someone instructing an employee on responsibility. Then He would draw a net around the story, and lo and behold, He was talking about the end times and His return. More than giving us hope and instructions, however, He was trying to communicate *what our attitude ought to be as we see the clouds of forever moving into the sky overhead, and as we hear the winds of prophecy blowing with gale force in the heavens*. We ought to be watching and waiting and worshipping. It is two of those parables we look at in the lesson, as we wind down our look at the stories Jesus told as He walked this earth.

In Mark, chapter 13, Jesus was talking about the end times. In verse 31, He makes this astonishing statement:

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Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (Mark 13:31)

That immediately once again drew a line between the two kingdoms. This one in which we invest most of our time, most of our money, and most of our influence, is not just going to diminish in importance. It's going to disappear. We see pictures of terrorist attacks where buildings are destroyed in a moment by a bomb, and we cannot stand to view the wreckage. Jesus is saying that in a moment, this entire world as we know it will explode and burn like that. On the other hand, *God's word and all it produces will not diminish one iota*. The word of God will stand forever. So make your choices, He is saying, with those two alternatives in mind. This world is going boom. God's word will keep going and going and going. The Energizer battery is nothing. Eventually it stops. God's word never will. Jesus goes on:

But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

(Mark 13:32-37)

There's our word in all its splendor. Watch and pray. Watch therefore. What I say unto you, I say unto all, "Watch". In the light of this astonishing fact: that the world is going up in smoke, Jesus gives us our marching orders, and He condenses it for us into one five letter word, watch. What does that word mean?

There are at least four primary Hebrew words used in the Old Testament, and at least three Greek words in the New that are translated into our English vocabulary as the word watch. If you take a stroll through the Bible, using your concordance, you will find it used 59 times. Here are some of the ways it is used:

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1- It is used of a protective kind of oversight:

...He said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. (Genesis 31:49)

In other words, “May God look after us while we are apart.”

2- It is used of a period of time in Exodus 14:24 and Matthew 14:25:

And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, (Exodus 14:24)

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. (Matthew 14:25)

3- It is used of guarding against an enemy in Job 7:12:

Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me? (Job 7:12)

4- It is used as a sign of being careful in Ezra 8:29 and Mark 14:38:

Watch ye, and keep *them*, until ye weigh *them* before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. (Ezra 8:29)

Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly *is* ready, but the flesh *is* weak. (Mark 14:38)

5- It is used to describe what you know about another.

For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? (Job 14:16)

6- It is used to describe waiting on someone or something.

My soul *waiteth* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: *I say, more than* they that watch for the morning. (Psalm 130:6)

7- It is used in the parable we just read, and in many other places to describe the process of being in readiness:

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (Matthew 24:42)

Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. (Mark 13:33)

And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (Mark 13:37)

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Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard,
and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch,
I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what
hour I will come upon thee. (Revelation 3:3)

The word can mean many things, but all of them point to an attitude towards time or towards what takes place in a period of time. As Jesus began to unfold this parable, it became obvious that this word would be the key word in the story, and it was meant to become the keystone of the church, becoming yet more and more intense as the years went by; for though no one knew the day or the hour, *we know He is coming back, and every day, then, must bring us one day closer to that day.* Therefore, every day we wait, the manner in which we wait becomes more important. Let's review what Jesus said in that crucial, but very brief story.

No one knows the exact time when He will return. No man does. No angel does. Only the Father knows. Because of this, Jesus says, "Take heed"! In other words, "Wake up and pay attention; there won't be any phone calls from heaven saying "a week from Friday at 3 pm Jesus is coming back." Groups that make those statements are defying Scriptural truth. No one will know but God. Therefore, pay attention. Watch and pray. The literal translation of the Greek word is: *"give strict attention to, take heed lest through remission and indolence, some destructive calamity suddenly overtake you."*

The picture is one of a sailor standing on the bow of a ship, peering into the distance with a telescope, watching an impending storm as those black clouds move with the swiftness of a hurricane in his direction. Every second is important. It may turn before it gets there. It may weaken in intensity. But the potential is there for it to sweep overhead and wreak havoc as it does. His job is not to crawl down below and go to sleep. This is no time to sleep. The storm may be coming. His job is to... watch!

Or it may be a soldier posted on guard duty outside the camp. He is told that the enemy has been sighted just across that divide. Will they come? Will they come tonight? No one knows. His job is to not let down his guard for one second. Until his time is past, he has one thing and only one thing to do...watch!

Or it may be a husband, a wife, or a parent who is waiting

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for someone they love to come home. The plane is late. There is no way to know exactly when they will arrive. It may be tonight, it may be tomorrow. You know, however, that they *are coming home*. You never stop peering into the distance, waiting. You may take turns, but until they arrive, you...watch!

Jesus now describes the kingdom as He so often did, by using the master and servant illustration. No picture was more indicative of the relationship between God and man than this, though it was distasteful to many. He speaks of the master of the house going on a long journey, the journey being Jesus' return to the Father after His ascension. He gave authority to those He left behind. He said,

...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth; go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I AM with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV)

Then He left. And He left the church in the hands of a handful of weak, barely trained servants. He gave us the commandment to work and the commandment to watch. And then He gave us the reason we are to stay out on the bow of the ship with that telescope pressed against our eye. He said, “You have no idea when I’m coming back. It could be early in the morning. It could be at noonday. It could be in the evening. It could be in the black of night. You have no idea *when*, but you do know I’m coming back. The worst thing you can do is to fall asleep and leave the ship adrift. You’d better not do that. So you take turns on watch duty, but you never let a watchman fall asleep on the job. The job is far too important for that.”

Verse 13 is important. It gives us two simple marching orders: work and watch. It says God has given to every man “his” (own) work. That means that what He has called you to do will probably be different than what I am called to do, *but each of us and all of us have a calling*. If you doubt that, you need to go back and read the “alls” in Scripture. “And He said to them all, if any man will come after Me, let Him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.” You do an “all” study, and you will find your “call” in the “all”. To others, He has, through different ways, given a specific ministry with children, or a serving ministry, or a teaching ministry, or an exhorting ministry, or a discipling

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or mentoring ministry. Some have been called to go to the far corners of the earth, others to the neighbor next door. But all have been called.

To take that calling lightly is to take Jesus lightly. If you are married, and you tell your mate you love him or love her more than anything in the world, and they ask you to do *one simple thing before you leave the house, and you just don't want to bother, or don't consider it important*, how are you showing love? That's why Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments". He added,

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.
(John 14:21)

I struggle with the lack of commitment people have in this age to ministering. It is as though people think they are doing God a favor to serve, to be available, to make it even to worship on a regular basis. There is so much to do. So many places to go. Recreation and relaxation have become, not a luxury, but a priority. Doing the work of the ministry has become an option, not a calling. God help us. The Creator God, Maker of heaven and earth, has personally called each of us to some kind of ministry labor. He is coming back soon. When He returns, will that calling be laid aside because we sense a need to conform to the attitudes of our generation? Will we greet Him with "Lord, had I lived a hundred years ago, I would have been more involved, but in this age, there is so much to do, I get tired and need more time to rest and play"? The fact that a hundred years ago our ancestors did not have all of the time-saving devices we have, and yet somehow serving the King dominated their thinking, ought to make us think, shouldn't it? When He comes, we must be working; we must be serving; we must be faithfully in the vineyard of the Master Gardener, bringing in the harvest. At that time, nothing else will matter. Ask God to speak to you today about your personal calling. Ask Him to help you take inventory of your priorities. God help us, when He comes, to be working.

There is a second calling in this parable. Not only are we to be working, we are to be watching. And that is where our word comes in. The working involves an *activity*. The watching involves an *attitude*. The attitude affects the activity. Jesus is

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saying, what I want you to do is to wake up each morning and run to the window and look up into the sky and say, “This could be the day My Lord returns. Since that is true, today my life will be motivated by the process of preparation for His arrival.” That ought to affect what we think about, what we decide to spend time doing, the urgency with which we approach spiritual things, and certainly the intensity with which we approach sharing the gospel. We are out on the bow of the ship, peering into the distance, expecting at any moment to see on the horizon the outline of an angel, and to hear the sound of a trumpet.

Any attitude less anticipatory than that denies God’s challenge to “watch”. Watching isn’t a casual, “I’ll check every so often, but doubt if it’ll be today” mentality. If “watch” is your “watchword”, you don’t put that eyeglass down for fear you might, for one second, not have your eye on the eastern sky. Beloved, *He is coming back*. Our task is to be ready. To be ready, we must be watching and working. Jesus told another parable in Luke, chapter 12, that was meant to illuminate the concept even further.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Let your loins be girded about, and *your* lights burning;

And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

Blessed *are* those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

(Luke 12:32-40)

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The passage begins: “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” What a gracious Father we have. It is His heart’s desire that we receive eternal, abundant life. He is not grudgingly giving a bunch of undeserving rebels what they rightfully shouldn’t have because He has no better option. He understands our sinfulness and our presumption. Yet still He loves us. Still He calls us. Still He empowers us. Still He promises us,

I will come again and receive you unto Myself.

With that in mind, we are to be ready for His coming. We are to get the two kingdoms straight in our minds. One is going to burn; one is going to remain. Everything we do for one will be swallowed up in flames; everything we do for the other will be stored in an eternal vault, “kept by the power of God unto salvation”. Therefore, says the Master, “Sell what you can, and give the proceeds to those in need, or to the furthering of the kingdom, and you will have eternal treasures, which moth and rust cannot corrupt, and which thieves cannot break through and steal.” You can count on it. Wherever your treasure is, that’s really a picture of your heart. If you are storing up treasures that will burn, while talking about the importance of eternity, you’re a hypocrite and a fool. Look for your treasures. Look where your investments are. There’s your heart. It’s right there. That’s what Jesus is saying.

“Let your loins be girded about.” Be prepared to move. Don’t let your guard down for a single moment. Jesus is coming soon. He wants to find you *about His Father’s business*. He wants to find you with your treasure and your heart buried in the kingdom which is to come. He wants to find you working and watching as though *you really expected Him any moment*. Otherwise, it’s all a farce. Otherwise, it’s all a game. Otherwise, it’s all a sham. To go to church and sing, “Jesus is coming soon,” and live as though there wasn’t a chance in a blue moon that the heavens are about to open, is living a lie. If you sing it, beloved, *expect it*.

I know. It’s been a long time since that day when the disciples watched Jesus ascend into the clouds, and they heard the angel say,

This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

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It's been nearly 2,000 years. The signs are getting clearer. The things that have to happen are happening. It could be any day. Jesus was saying,

And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.

(Luke 12:38)

If He tarries a long while, *and then comes and finds His servants watching, blessed are those servants*. We actually have a chance to be blessed in a greater way if we are "watching" because we are in the final watch. Time is running out. The world, and even the church is crying:

Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

(II Peter 3:4)

The promise is more precious with each passing day not less. The music of eternity swells to a greater crescendo with every sound of the trumpet. Yes, years have gone by. Yes, generations have come and gone. Praise God. That means that the blessing of His coming will be more wonderful and the hope of our calling more dynamic with every passing moment. Look up. He's coming! Look out. He's coming! Look around. He's coming! And beloved, He's coming soon.

Our passage in Luke 12 is not finished yet, however. Peter heard what the Master said, and as usual, Peter had a question. We all have those questions; Peter was just bold enough to ask. Listen:

Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season?

Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;

The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will

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cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:41-48)

“Who are you talking to now, Lord? Just we disciples, *or all of your followers?*” The rest of the passage makes it clear He was speaking to His servants, those who were believers. The last three verses indicate that He was, however, differentiating in the levels of responsibilities between them and some others, *and the difference would be in their level of understanding*. Beloved, hang on. This gets specific, and if your goal in life is to attain more knowledge without necessarily achieving more obedience, this passage may be your prompting to rethink your life goals.

The parable tells of three categories of people. The first group are those who profess to be believers, but who, when no one is looking, behave in such a way as to prove that Christ does not live in their heart. They will be cut asunder and given their rightful portion with other unbelievers. The facade will fade. The mask will melt. They may have been a whiz at the corner church, but never trusted Christ as Savior. Jesus will have to say,

Depart from me; I never knew you.

The second group will be those believers who knew God's will, who knew their calling, who knew that they were appointed to watch duty, to stand and gaze into the heavens awaiting the coming One, preparing with each day the more perfectly for His coming. They knew. But they didn't watch. They are without excuse. They went to all those Bible studies. They learned all those verses. They listened to all those radio programs. They had “Jesus loves you” bumper stickers on their cars, their houses, and their big overstuffed Bibles. They knew the names of all the beasts in Revelation and all the plagues in Exodus. They knew about all the different views of eschatology and could expound on all of the opinions on election.

But they weren't watching. They weren't living in obedience

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to the things that mattered; they were too busy being Pharisees. The storms of eternity were forming overhead and they were more interested in arguing over who the anti-Christ might be than they were in seeing the gospel go to the ends of the earth, and to the house next door.

The third group were those who knew the Lord, but didn't have much of a handle on truth yet. They are babes in Christ. They, too, will be responsible, but their level of responsibility will be lighter. Why? Because "to whom much is given, much will be required." Oh, how we love to use and misuse that passage. Beloved, be careful. Be sure you understand what it means.

It means that the more you learn, the more responsible you become. It means the more information you store in your heart about who Jesus is, and what Jesus expects of a disciple, *the higher the standard by which your obedience will be measured*. If you just have to read ten more books a month, hear six more sermons a week, and run the radio dial back and forth between four Christian radio stations to feel spiritual, you might want to stop and ask yourself what you're doing.

Don't stop studying. Don't stop learning. Don't stop being mentored and trained. That's not the answer. But if you're learning as an end within itself, stop it. If you are "ever learning, never coming to a knowledge of the truth", stop it. If you are proud of your theology, chances are that the pride problem makes your theology of no value. God is looking for men and women whose hearts are pure, and whose motives are simply to know Christ and to make Him known. They see all knowledge as vessels through which they can become more obedient and more effective in being used of God. Beyond that, they recognize the dangers of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. It "puffs up". It swells the head, cuts off the blood supply to the brain, and causes heart problems. Bad trade.

Our Lord has taken a long time to come back. He explained that in II Peter 3:9. Remember?

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
(II Peter 3:9)

That's why He's waiting. But He is coming. That's why we're watching. He's coming soon. That's why we need to be watching

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with such intensity, with such expectancy, with such integrity that there is not a moment when we are not on guard duty. There must not be a moment in our thoughts or in our ministering or in our study time or in our time alone with God where our hearts are not scanning the skies for the entrance into history of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We ought to be filtering every plan, every goal, every investment through the lens of the finality of that moment. We ought to read the papers, listen to the news, plan our time with the understanding that one day very soon, *every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*

That's not a dream; that's a promise. And of the One who made that promise it is said, *"There hath not failed one word of all that He hath promised."* Not one word? Not one word. He said He's coming again? He said He's coming again. He said we are to be on deck watching for His appearing? He did. And He said *the more you know about His faithfulness, the more accountable you are to keep your eye on that eastern sky.* The more He has blessed you with understanding, the more you must understand that, when He comes, He must find you about the Father's business.

He also said there is an extra blessing for those in the third or fourth watch of the night. As the hands of the clock of eternity near midnight, the blessings multiply if we have not allowed the cynicism of the age to dampen the urgency of our expectancy. He is saying that the longer we wait, and the more faithfully we watch, and the more earnestly we work, the more wonderfully we will be rewarded on that day.

So, let's all get into the habit of looking up, shall we? Let's stop moaning and groaning about the problems in the government, the problems in the schools, the problems in the stock market, and the problems that approach us in the coming year.

Jesus is coming again!

The government will be upon *His* shoulders.

The stock market will be down to zero where it belongs.

All of earth's computers will be silenced and still.

He will be our God and we shall be His people.

And every eye shall see Him.

Until then, beloved, God has given us a specific assignment. You and I are to watch. We are to stand on our spiritual tip-

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toes and gaze into the distance, eagerly expecting that at any moment, the Master will return, and we want to be...ready. That is our calling.

And our response?

I pray that it might be said, that all the people said...

Amen.

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Meditate on Mark 13:31. Cross-reference it. What do you think it means? How can that one verse help you make crucial decisions in your life?

2- Can you explain Mark 13:32? What do you think it means when it says, “neither the Son”?

3- Reread the uses of the word watch on pages 4-6 of your transcript. What similarities exist in all cases? How do they all, in essence, apply to the passage in Mark 13?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- Have you ever asked God about your calling? Have you ever asked Him to make it clear to you what specific things He has in mind for you to do? Are you willing to ask Him? It doesn't matter how old or how young you are. Ask Him.

2- How would you describe your attitude towards the second coming of Christ? Are you eagerly anticipating His coming? Is it vague and uncertain to you? Do you tend to doubt that it is to be a literal coming?

3- Do you begin each day by looking into the heavens and praying “Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly”? Is your heart pure enough to want Him to come today? Are there things you plan to get straight before He returns or calls you home, but *you keep putting it off*? Is that not a sign that you are not expecting Him today?

4- Are you constantly learning new things and becoming more accountable, but not necessarily seeking to obey the things you have already learned? Reread Luke 12:47-48. Have you been blessed to learn much? Do you count it a blessing to have much required of you? You should.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Luke 12:42-44

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