

Like a Thief in the Night

While there are many topics that can be preached upon from today's texts, the ones that caught my eye were the last two verses of the Gospel reading, **"But know this: 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. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."** One could get the impression that Luke had just put these verses together as he heard them, that the apostle who was telling them only remembered these parts of a bigger lesson that Jesus was telling the apostles. Luke, having only these portions of what Jesus taught, saw a connection of being prepared between these 'independent' verses and lumped them together. Whatever factors went into this final form of Luke's Gospel account, we have been given these verses and as such must deal with them. In looking at various commentaries about this text, the authors of those commentaries actually have little to say about these two verses.

If we just stick to the main theme about being prepared and take from the other readings about having a proper faith or trust that God will fulfill His promises on God's timeframe, then we could just use these last two verses as a warning that Jesus is going to come again at a time when we will not necessarily be forewarned. But it still struck me that it is a bit of an odd way of saying it, especially when we consider that earlier in the chapter when Jesus told the parable of the rich man and his barns (which we heard last week), we can come to that conclusion we don't know when we will face the time of judgement, that is, when we will die. So, it seems as if there must be something more to these verses.

One could draw that analogy that both the thief and Jesus come at unexpected, unknown hours, then Jesus is like a thief. But a thief comes and takes

something away from the owner of the house and we believe that Jesus gives us something. One could conclude that the only similarity between the thief and Jesus is the unexpected time in which they come to enter a house. However, from the houseowner's point of view, there seems to be little difference between them. In both instances, someone is trying to break into their house. If the message is simply to be ready, be prepared, does this evoke the call for needing to prepare for two different happenings? In the case of the thief, one prepares to keep their house, their heart, so to speak, closed up. The owner does not want the thief to come and take what is precious to them. In the case of Jesus, Jesus wants to come and give us something that is precious to Him - namely the love of His Father and our Creator. In this case, we need to open up our house to Jesus, open up our hearts for Him. But that is where the rub comes in, discerning which is a thief and which is Jesus. There is plenty of warning throughout the Bible about being aware of the one who tries to trick us into thinking that they are from God, but in reality, they are the thief trying to take something precious from us. Maybe that is where the Holy Spirit comes in, helping us to discern between Jesus and the thief. The Holy Spirit guides us to study the Scriptures, listen to what others hear in those holy words and opens our hearts and minds to hear what God wants us to hear.

There could be another reason why Jesus is covertly comparing Himself to a thief. A really good thief would leave no trace of entering the house. You only find out that the thief was there when you notice that something is missing, something that has value, not only to you, but also to the thief. Maybe that is what Jesus is saying here - that you don't know not only when Jesus is coming, but sometimes you can't tell that He has already been there, in your house, in your heart until the seed that is planted in your heart begins to grow and blossom.

When we take this notion along with the verb tense in the *Greek* at the beginning of this text, we get a little clearer picture of this. In the first verse of the text, where Jesus tells us not to have any fear He also says that it is the Father's pleasure to give us the kingdom. In the *Greek* in which this text was written, the verb tense indicates that it is something that has already happened. The Father has already given us the kingdom. So, if we already have been given the kingdom but do not know it, maybe Jesus needs to come like a thief and open our hearts to it.

At first glance, while these verses from the *Gospel* reading seem to have a central theme, some of the images evoked from them seem a little hazy, giving a sense of a disconnection between these brief sayings of Jesus. It almost seems as if Luke is just recording what he had been told kind of in an outline form. Perhaps these opening lines of these different sayings brought to mind the rest of what Jesus had said without Luke needing to write down the entire story. Whatever the reason, we have the text that is before us. When we scratch the surface of the verses, pushing those images that are called up for us, we see a richer text, a text that for those who have ears to hear, gives us a clear message.

The theme that ties these verses together, not only to each other, but also to the other readings for today is the theme of trusting in *God* that *God* will fulfill the promises that have been given to us. Through that trust, we should be prepared for when the promise is fulfilled. In the *Gospel* reading, Jesus tells us that the promise is already fulfilled; that it not only is near as He preached at the start of His public ministry preaching and as John the Baptist preached; that *God* has given us the kingdom.

The question then before us is for what and whom are we preparing? Are we preparing for a thief, fortifying our 'houses', securing our treasures so that no one can take them, so that we do not lose what is ours; or are we preparing for receiving that which has been promised to us long ago, that which has already been given to us, of which there is more than enough for everyone who believes in Jesus?

YouTube links

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/Huao9dxWZgU>

Service: <https://youtu.be/yuEwe8bIM6Y>