

Luke 12:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants (κὰν ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ κὰν ἐν τῇ τῇ τρίτῃ φυλακῇ ἔλθῃ καὶ εὔρῃ οὕτως, μακάριοί εἰσιν οἱ δοῦλοι ἐκεῖνοι, kan en tē deutera kan en tē tritē phylakē elthē kai heurē houtōs, makarioi eisin hoi douloi ekeinoi)—Jesus extends the timing scenario to emphasize sustained watchfulness. The phylakē (φυλακή, watch) divided the night into periods for guard duty. The Romans used four watches (evening, midnight, cock-crowing, morning), while Jews traditionally used three.

The second watch (roughly 10 PM - 2 AM) and third watch (2 AM - 6 AM) represent the deepest, most difficult hours of the night when fatigue tempts servants to sleep. The conditional clause kan (κὰν, even if) with subjunctive verbs (elthē, ἔλθῃ, he comes; heurē, εὔρῃ, he finds) acknowledges uncertainty about timing. The adverb houtōs (οὕτως, so, in this manner) refers back to verse 37—still watching, still ready. Repeated blessing (makarioi, μακάριοι) emphasizes God's favor toward those who maintain vigilance regardless of delay. The parable warns against presuming Christ's return will align with our expectations or convenience.

Historical Context

Night watches were crucial in ancient warfare and household security. Guards who fell asleep on duty faced severe punishment, even death, because their negligence endangered the entire community. Jesus' hearers would immediately grasp the

seriousness of maintaining vigilance through the difficult late-night hours. Early Christians expected Christ's imminent return (Romans 13:11-12, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), but as time passed, some grew complacent (2 Peter 3:3-4). This parable addresses the danger of abandoning watchfulness due to apparent delay.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does sustained watchfulness through the second and third watches teach about enduring faithfulness despite apparent delay?
2. How should the uncertainty of Christ's return timing affect daily Christian living and long-term perseverance?
3. What spiritual disciplines and practices help maintain vigilance during the 'deep night' seasons of waiting?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐὰν	ἔλθῃ	ἐν	τῇ	δευτέρᾳ	φυλακῇ,	καὶ	ἐν	τῇ
And	if	come	in	G3588	the second	watch	And	in	G3588
G2532	G1437	G2064	G1722		G1208	G5438	G2532	G1722	
τρίτῃ	φυλακῇ,	ἔλθῃ	καὶ	εὕρῃ	οὕτως	μακάριοί	εἰσιν		
the third	watch	come	And	find	them so	blessed	are		
G5154	G5438	G2064	G2532	G2147	G3779	G3107	G1526		
οἱ	δοῦλοι	ἐκεῖνοι							
G3588	servants	those							
	G1401	G1565							

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 25:6 (Parallel theme): And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

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