

Stories with Purpose: How does Christian hope transform everyday life?

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[0 : 00] So let's turn together now back to Matthew 25 and let's read this central parable and think about that parable but the the wider teaching of Matthew 25 together. Again the kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.

To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also the one with two bags of gold gained two more but the man who'd received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who'd received five bags of gold brought the other five. Master he said you entrusted me with five bags of gold, see I have gained five more. His master replied well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things.

Come and share your master's happiness. The man with two bags of gold also came. Master he said you entrusted me with two bags of gold, see I have gained two more. His master replied well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things.

Come and share your master's happiness. Then the man who'd received one bag of gold came. Master he said I knew that you are a hard man. Harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground.

[1 : 47] See here is what belongs to you. His master replied you wicked lazy servant. So you knew that I harvest what I have not sown and gather what I have not scattered seed. Well then you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Amen. So here we are the parable that's often known as the parable of the talents.

And perhaps as we come to this we can come with a question. How does Christian hope transform everyday life? I want to begin with a truth that the Christian church has what the world is looking for. I came across recently a study done crossing 28 different countries asking the question what worries the world? And the top answers is from August of last year. Now perhaps unsurprisingly COVID-19 topped the list. Now but there was also unemployment, poverty, corruption and crime.

And to ask that question and to reflect on the answers it perhaps reveals that for many looking at the world today there is a sense of anxiety. The question where is the world heading? It all looks chaotic.

But what does Jesus say? What does the Bible say? About where the world is heading? It's very clear that the world is not heading for chaos. It's not heading for destruction. The world and history is heading for the return of Christ Jesus the King. It's heading for the renewal of all things in and under Christ.

[4 : 0 0] There are many people in our world who are asking the question how can I find hope? It's the cry of the lonely and the suffering. The anxious. Perhaps it's the question that everybody asks as they take a look around and wonder what's going on. And again what does our Bible tell us about hope? What does Matthew's gospel tell us about hope? Here is Jesus speaking about the end of times and his return. And how does Matthew's gospel give us hope? Well after this, straight after this, chapters 26 to 28, we find a focus moving towards the suffering and death of Jesus and the resurrection. And that's where hope is centered because there at the cross and in the rejection, the betrayal, we see sin and evil and darkness doing its worst against the king who is altogether good. But in the resurrection, we find

Jesus has defeated the darkness. Jesus is victorious over the devil and sin and death. He is the point of hope. There is hope at what we could call the midpoint of history. It's Jesus and his resurrection. And that true is the hope for the end point of history. Our hope is Jesus and the return of Christ the king. What he has started, the cross and the resurrection, he will finish. Sin, suffering, death will be defeated and destroyed. Once and for all, the world will be made new. God's people will enjoy life on this earth for all eternity with a perfect savior. Jesus is our hope. But the question for today, and I think it's a question we find in Matthew 25, is this. What difference does Christian hope make for everyday life?

What difference does the return of Christ make to my tomorrow? To how I live in my family, how I go to my job? How does it shape my present living? So Matthew 25, Matthew 24 as well, Jesus teaches on the end times and on his return. And as I said, we're going to focus on the central parable in Matthew 25, but we're going to survey the key themes in all three. And here's what I want us to see. It's this. It's because Christ is coming back. His servants, that's how the people of God are described, how we're called to be servants. His servants should live with watchfulness, holiness, and faithfulness.

It's a very appropriate message for today, for new office bearers. We want our office bearers, new or old, to be watchful, holy, and faithful. But that's a reality that should categorize all of God's people, all of God's servants. So let's begin, first of all, by looking at our parable, recognizing that the kingdom of heaven brings both privilege and responsibility. So our story divides itself, I think, neatly into three different scenes. Again, this is one of these parables Jesus tells, giving us a picture of the kingdom of heaven. The first scene, verses 14 and 15, we find some money being distributed. Jesus tells the story of a master who's departing on a journey, and we discover that the return of the master is an uncertain time. We don't know when that's going to happen. Verse 19, we're told it comes after a long time. So he's going on a journey, and as he does, he entrusts his property to servants. The NIV talks about bags of gold. So one of the confusing things about older translations, they talked about talents, which maybe sounds like abilities, but actually it was a weight of money, a weight of metal. So we can think about gold bags. Each bag, the experts tell us, would be worth about 20 years of wages. And those bags are distributed, verse 15, each according to his ability. So in verse 14 and 15, we discover two things. We discover that he's a master, and that master has absolute authority over his possessions and over his servants. And we discover servants, and they have an obligation of duty, an obligation to work for and to serve their master.

So that's the first scene. Second scene, verses 16 to 18, we discover the servants' actions. The actions of three of those servants, two of them, we're told, verse 16, went at once. The good servants put the master's money to work and gain more. So two, take positive action.

[9 : 08] One, he digs a hole and hides the money in there. So remember, if you were here a few weeks ago, we looked at a parable where it could be common in times of war or for security to dig a hole and to put money there. But the problem is, and it becomes clear from the master's words, that he knows this isn't the right thing to do. This is a refusal to do any work. This is disobedience on behalf of this servant. So those are the actions. Two, put the money to work. One, digs a hole. And then verse 19 to 30 rather, is the day of reckoning. It's the settling of the accounts. And we're told that this takes place after a long time. And so there's certain glimpses that we get reminding us that within this parable, Jesus is teaching us about the theme. The theme is his return.

So Jesus has said in Matthew 24, verse 36, about the day or hour of his return, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the sun, but only the father. So it's an unknown time of return when Jesus will come back. But when this master who represents Jesus comes back, he invites the servants to come. In verse 20, we can read, the man who's received five bags of gold, brought the other five. Master, he said, you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more. And then the one with two does exactly the same thing. And both of them receive the same positive verdict. Well done, good and faithful servant. That because they have shown themselves faithful with a few things, there is this positive promise. Both that they will receive more responsibility, but also there is this invitation to joy. Come and share your master's happiness. And again, this is one of those moments where it takes us beyond the parable to thinking about the return of Christ and the reality that will be true for his people sharing in the happiness, the eternal happiness of Jesus. So this parable has this wonderful kingdom come theme where Jesus is saying, faithful with a few, faithful in serving. Now you can look forward to a wonderful reward when Jesus returns. Glorious work and glorious joy in the new heavens and the new earth for those who are good and faithful. But of course there's the third servant, isn't there? That third servant who had hard words to say about his master. I knew that you were a hard man. And so he overlooked his responsibility.

He actually misrepresents his master. He refuses to obey. He lacks love. He is unwilling to serve. And so the master condemns this man. Verse 26, you wicked, lazy servant.

The master says, your own words condemn you. If you think I'm a hard man looking for things that I haven't worked for, then why didn't you put my money to work in the bank? And there is a negative promise.

Verse 28, take the bag of gold from him. Verse 30, throw that worthless servant outside. And again, even in this final moment of judgment, there's a reminder that this is about more than just a story. This is about the return of Jesus the judge because of the language. Throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[13 : 00] darkness and misery, pictures of eternal judgment in hell for those who refuse and reject the master. Those who receive this verdict of worthless. And we have this solemn reminder from Jesus that to dishonor this master, to disobey this master is to have no place in his joy, but rather to know eternal misery. The kingdom of heaven brings privilege and responsibility as we see from this parable.

Now I imagine there's elements of this story that we have seen. Possibly we've seen it in our office or workplace. Possibly we've seen it in our classroom. The boss or the teacher isn't around. They have to go away for a while and then they don't come back for a little while. Perhaps the boss is away for a meeting all afternoon. And what happens in those situations is sometimes you'll find that people will divide into two categories. Some will continue to graft, to try and work hard, to stay on task. But other people take the opportunity to laze around. Take the opportunity to take advantage of this freedom. Ah, the person in charge is away. So let's do as we please. And sadly, Jesus' parable reminds us that we can see the same with regards to Jesus. That while some will be faithful, some will not.

He, Jesus, is the master. He is the one who will depart. And remember, Matthew's going to go straight from this parable to his going to the cross, rising from the tomb, and then returning to heaven. So he's going to depart to glory by way of the cross and the resurrection. Jesus is the one who gives, as it were, these spiritual bags of gold to his people. It is in Jesus that we find new life.

It is in Jesus that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It's through trusting in Jesus that we have the hope of eternal life. It's Jesus by the Spirit who gives spiritual gifts. These are all privileges that we have in the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus, our master, calls for service.

He gives each one of us, having made us in his image, having made us all unique, gifts, abilities, and opportunities. And they look very different for each one of us. And in different seasons of life, they will all be different. But we all have that responsibility, whatever our gifts, abilities, opportunities, to honor him. To be at work in his kingdom. There's that responsibility within the kingdom of heaven. And notice, and it's so important for us to notice, how does the master speak? He speaks, well done, not good and successful servant, well done, good and faithful servant. It's faithfulness that our master, the Lord Jesus, is looking for in our everyday life.

[16 : 10] So Matthew 25 in this parable is reminding us, this master who has departed, who gives gifts, who expects work, will come back one day. He will return on the day of judgment. And on that day, he will pass a verdict on all of our lives. And the question we all need to ask ourselves today, not on that day, not on that day, as today, is what will the verdict be on my life?

What word am I going to hear from Jesus on that day? Because this parable tells us, in all seriousness, there will be some who will hear worthless.

Why? Because they refuse the call of Jesus, the master. No faith, no obedience. Wasting of gospel privileges. Heard the gospel, had the chance of fellowship in a church.

You know, we often think about the unreached people groups, hundreds of millions of people, never heard the name of Jesus. We have. If we waste those privileges, we will hear worthless.

The verdict, that's not the verdict we want, is it? We want to hear, well done, good and faithful servant. We want to be those who today and every day choose to honor Jesus as master. Who live with faithfulness to him and his commands.

[17 : 38] Who use what he has given to honor him. Three actions I think we can all helpfully take.

The first is that we can pray. Perhaps we need to confess the ways that we've not been faithful. Perhaps we need to pray that we would endure and persevere in faithfulness.

Perhaps we need to pray to see the opportunities that God gives us to be faithful in his kingdom. Secondly, we need to encourage one another.

We are called into local churches into fellowship and we need to support and spur one another on to love and good works. To encourage one another towards this kind of faithfulness.

And three, we are to serve as we are able. Serve as we are able. We all have different abilities and different opportunities and those are given to us by God.

[18 : 39] And so we shouldn't grumble and we shouldn't be proud and we shouldn't be envious. Rather, we should look to think and to pray. How can I be faithful today? Recognizing the kingdom brings privilege and responsibility.

Well, having thought for a few minutes about this parable in detail, let's scale back. Let's think wide angle over this whole chapter to recognize that there are three parables here from which we can draw three commands.

But again, just to recognize that as Jesus teaches, Matthew 24, 25, as he knows the cross is coming, he also knows he will rise again.

So he knows he must suffer and die to save sinners. He knows he must rise again to show his power and victory over sin and death and the devil. And that's the focus of Matthew 26 to 28.

But he also knows, and it becomes clear from these chapters, that he will return. He will return as the last stage of the Father's salvation timetable.

[19 : 44] And here in Matthew chapter 25, he gives instructions, particular instructions. Instructions for his servants. So every Christian is called to be a servant.

Instructions for servant. And how to live with faith and hope until his return. So let's look at three emphases we can get from each of these parables.

First, servants of Jesus live with watchfulness. John Piper, a number of years ago, wrote a really helpful book called Don't Waste Your Life.

It's a really powerful book, actually. And what prompted that, it was a story he read in a magazine. It was a story of a retired couple who obviously had made plenty of money during their working careers.

And as they retired, they thought, here's what we'll do. We'll buy ourselves a fancy yacht and we'll sail around from bay to bay, coast to coast, and we'll collect shells. And I think it was Time Magazine did an article on this couple.

[20 : 45] And John Piper read, and he thought, what a tragedy. To spend years of your life lazing about collecting shells. We were made for so much more than that.

We were made for eternal joy. And we were made with present purpose. And Matthew 25 gives us our purpose to use our time, to use our talents for our King.

And so that first parable, the parable of these ten virgins, these ten young women, waiting for a bridegroom to begin a wedding feast, really emphasizes watchfulness.

So if you have your Bible, you can turn back to 25, 1 to 13. What we discover there are two groups of young women. One group who are wise, one group who are foolish.

What makes the difference is that some are prepared to wait a long time for the bridegroom to come back. Others are not prepared. So they have their lamps, they have their lights to welcome.

[21 : 54] Some bring extra oil, and some don't. And what happens at the end of the story? The cry goes out, here comes the bridegroom.

Get ready. Only half hour. So some enter the feast, and some in the end are sent away. Jesus says to us, to be wise is to be ready for Christ's certain return.

The return is certain. The timing is not. So we need to live as people who are watchful. But I think there's a particular emphasis that we can also take from this, from these two groups side by side, perhaps looking identical, until the point where we realize some are ready and some are not.

Being around those who are ready to meet with Jesus is not enough. Being around those who have faith in the Lord Jesus, who have trusted him personally, is not enough.

Faith cannot be shared. Holiness cannot be shared. Personal commitment is required. Servants of Jesus live with watchfulness.

[23 : 07] The first way to be ready is to be trusting in Jesus. But again, as we sort of think about our big question, where's the world heading?

This parable reminds us, chaos is not the final destiny. The return of Christ is the opportunity, the invitation to great joy. It's where the world is heading. And so we need to be watchful and not lose sight of that.

Not lose sight of our need to be right with God. Need to be right with God today. To not lose sight of what is of first importance.

How easy it is to start collecting shells and not to realize we're wasting our lives. Not to lose sight of being ready to meet our maker and our master.

To not lose sight of this future award. This wedding feast is such a powerful image in the Bible. The Bible speaks of eternal life as being like a wedding feast.

[24 : 15] A place of joy that lasts forever. Where Jesus is the bridegroom and the church, the people who are trusting him, they're like the bride. And so joy is our future when we are prepared for the return of Jesus by putting our trust in him.

So servants of Jesus live with watchfulness. Secondly, servants of Jesus live with holiness.

So sometimes we'll see different variations of the fly-on-the-wall documentary. Now whether that's following a sports team.

Whether that's following a group of children in a classroom. Whether that's a fly-on-the-wall documentary looking at a particular company. One of the things that will always reveal is, how do people act behind closed doors when the boss isn't around?

Does that particular group in focus maintain their values when the person in charge is away? And that's one of the great emphases of Matthew 25.

[25 : 25] Our master Jesus calls us to match his heart and his values. To live serving him even while he is absent.

And what is Jesus like? Jesus is holy. As the eternal son of God, he is without sin. He is in a different moral category from us.

And as Jesus, the God-man, he is the one who never sinned. But always lived to please his father. Always lived for the glory of his father.

And his people are told, Be holy because I am holy. To be holy. First by trusting in Jesus that he would make us holy.

And then recognizing that united to Jesus. That Jesus, by his presence and power in us, transforms us and enables us to be holy, to love as he loves.

[26 : 28] And we can see that in the third parable in Matthew 25. The parable of the sheep and the goats. Again, it's a parable of separation, isn't it?

There are the sheep who receive reward, the goats who receive judgment. And within this parable, there's that call to follow the example of Christ.

What do all of these, when he says, I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, I needed clothes, I was ill, I was in prison. What are they? They're examples of self-giving love for the sake of others.

Sacrificial love, especially for the weak and the poor. Who's that a picture of? Isn't that a picture of the Lord Jesus? Doesn't that reveal his heart, his values, his love?

And so Jesus is saying, when he is absent, while we wait his return, servants of Christ are to show a measure of real, lived out obedience to the will of God in the way that we love others.

[27 : 35] It's a way of showing our practical holiness. That we would heed that command of Hebrews 12, verse 14, make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy.

Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. So a question for us to ask, is holiness a priority for me today?

Is that something I take seriously? Is that something I ever think about? Am I watchful of my words and actions, my thoughts and emotions? Is my life bearing the fruit of love towards God and to others because the Holy Lord Jesus has saved me and is empowering me and is living within me?

Servants of Jesus live with holiness. And then to circle back to the central parable, to recognize that servants of Jesus live with faithfulness.

So I just finished a missionary biography of a guy called James O. Fraser, who's a missionary to the Lizu people in China. And when he died, there was sort of reports from his missionary team that were recorded in the book.

[28 : 49] And what you got a sense was that they'd lost both a great leader and a great friend. They'd lost a role model and a real source of encouragement. But there was one missionary who wrote something that just really connected with my thoughts this week on this passage.

When she said this, Isabel Kuhn, you may have heard of her, she wrote, it is one thing to be praised by a person who has no experience of your task.

It is quite different to win a well done from one who is himself a master in that very line of things. They loved when James O. Fraser said well done because they knew that he had lived well as a missionary.

Now think about what we just read, what's central to our parable is the Christian hope of hearing well done, good and faithful servant.

From who? From the Lord Jesus who is the great servant. he was perfectly faithful to his service.

[30 : 02] Always found doing his father's will. Always seeking to bring his father glory all the way to the cross. Dying to serve us by saving us.

And what's Jesus doing now? Still serving us. He's still living to plead our cause. He's still living to pray for his people. Always. praise.

The one who says well done, good and faithful servant is the one who served us so faithfully and continues to do so. And what this parable calls us to do is to live as faithful servants in response.

Knowing just how good and faithful Jesus has been to us and for us. With hearts that are full of love for him we are called to be faithful. The parable reminds us we'll be held accountable for what we do with the message and how we serve in the kingdom.

And remember it's not good and successful it's good and faithful. Faithfulness is vital. Faithful in our everyday obedience. With that desire that in the end we'd hear well done not worthless.

[31 : 15] So the return of Christ fuels Christian hope. It gives us that reminder against the anxiety that panics and wonders where is the world heading.

We know it's heading for the return of Christ. It speaks certain hope against the wistful thinking that hopes are we as people we can save the world we can create some kind of heaven on earth.

No our hope is fixed on the Lord Jesus a living returning saviour. And because he is coming back one day because he is coming back to speak a word over us every day we are to live watchful holy faithful lives of service that we would hear well done on that day.

by trusting him as saviour and living for him as king. Let's pray briefly about that now. Lord God once again we give you thanks that Jesus the master in this parable is also the suffering servant the one who gave his life as a ransom for sinners the one who ever lives to plead our cause to make intercession for us in heaven and we pray that you would help us to be faithful that even as his return can sometimes seem so distant in our minds we pray that you would help us to fix our hope fix our eyes on eternity so that we would live with watchfulness keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus so that we would live with holiness Lord we pray that you would transform our everyday reality as you would impress upon our hearts and lives the reality of the return of Christ

Lord we pray that this message would be one that would be heard in our city today and heard in our nation today for those who feel hopeless for those who are terribly anxious about what's happening in the world today help them to see Jesus as that fixed point that point of certain hope and may they entrust themselves to him Lord we pray in particular this week as our church will be in general assembly we pray for ministers and elders who will gather together to hear reports and to have discussions and to make decisions Lord may we have that sense of watchfulness and may you give us as a church faithfulness may you help us to pursue holiness as a church in this nation as we seek to be about our master's business

[34 : 28] Lord we pray that you would raise up more workers for serving you here in Scotland and around the world more who could preach and teach more who could train and disciple Lord that you would continue to build your church among us Lord help us to continue to reflect to allow your word to ask questions of our hearts we pray and may you by your spirit so work in all of us that we would be ready to meet with the Lord Jesus and that it would be your will that each one would hear well done good and faithful servant as you would cause us to turn from sin and to trust in Jesus and we pray in his name Amen