

The Master goes away and comes back

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Preacher: John Woods

[0:00] Well, good evening. My name is Philip Wells. I'm welcoming you to this meeting of Calvary Church, which has been pre-recorded for the evening of the 12th of July.

I'm Philip Wells, but I'm introducing the speaker, who's John Woods, who will speak to us shortly, and I'll be handing over to him. My introduction will be fairly short. Let me first pray, and then I'll read.

Amen. We thank you that we can spend time considering your word. Thank you for the gifts to your church of people who can open your word to us. We pray that you will help us to hear the words that John brings to us shortly.

We come to you this evening thanking you for all your kindness and mercy to us. Thanking you for your protection and your blessing, but in particular thanking you for the salvation you have shown to us in your Son, Jesus Christ.

Teach us to love him and serve him and to wait for the Son from heaven. Teach us how to number our days here on earth so that we may be looking to the final coming of the Lord and all that that means.

[1:23] Teach us how to be looking forward, be walking by faith, although not by sight, and to be people of hope for the future. So we bring ourselves to you just now, confessing our sins, asking your blessing, and seeking that you will refresh us and stir us to live for you through our time this evening.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to read the passage, which is Matthew 25, verses 14 to 30.

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on a journey. Then he went on his journey.

The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five talents more. So also the one with two talents gained two more.

[2:41] But the one who had received the one talent 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 had received the five talents brought the other five. Master, he said, you entrusted me with five talents.

See, I've gained five more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servant. You've 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 the two talents also came. Master, he said, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I've gained two more. And the master replied, well done, good and faithful servant.

You've 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 had received the one talent came.

[3:47] Master, he said, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown, gathering where you have not scattered. So I was afraid and I went out and hid your talent in the ground.

See, here is what belongs to you. His master said, you wicked, lazy servant. So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where 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. Take the one talent from him. Give it to the one who has the ten talents.

For every one who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whatever, whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. So read God's word.

[4:49] And it's quite a serious and sobering word, isn't it? Before John speaks, we'll sing about our only refuge from the wrath of God, which is beneath the cross of Jesus.

We'll sing that, and John will speak to us. Beneath the cross of Jesus, I find a place to stand, and wonder at such mercy, that cools me as I am.

For hands that should discard me, hold wounds which tell me, come. Beneath the cross of Jesus, my unworthy soul is one.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, his family is my own. Once strangers chasing selfless dreams, now one through grace alone.

How could I now dishonor the ones that you have loved? Beneath the cross of Jesus, see the children called my God.

[6:45] Beneath the cross of Jesus, the path before the crown, we follow in his footsteps, where promised hope is found.

How great the joy before us, to be his perfect bride. Beneath the cross of Jesus, we will gladly live our lives.

One of the things I appreciate about the parables of Jesus, is the word like.

Every picture tells a story. Last week you heard Jesus talk about the future being like ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. Five wise and five foolish.

This evening we're looking at how the future is like to other things. If you had a conversation with a financial consultant, they would perhaps talk to you about the language of risk.

[8:07] Are you willing to take a risk in your investments? Or are you risk averse? Some people like to ski off piste, thrive on the elixir of adventure and danger.

Others like to play it safe. One of the books that shaped my view of life is Paul Tonier's *The Adventure of Living*. He suggests that men in particular need a blend of security and adventure. Too much security and they die of boredom. Too much adventure and they die of excitement. A friend of mine lent me a book about dull men.

These included a man whose job was to watch paint dry. Someone has to predict the drying times that are on the tin, I suppose. Another was a roundabout spotter.

He was affectionately known as the Lord of the Rings. The third man in *The Parable of the Talents* or *Bags of Gold* would probably be a candidate for a chapter in a book about dull men.

[9:21] He failed to understand the motivation of his master. He missed an opportunity to discover true security by playing it safe.

He was correct in his assessment of his master's high standards but drew the wrong conclusion from this assessment. A talent was worth around about 6,000 denarii.

Denarii was the day labour earned each day. So we're talking about somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000 pounds for a talent.

One man was given five, one was given two, one was given one. They had responsibility for this money whilst their master was away and they were given the task of making the capital work, getting a good return.

Double return was perceived to be a good return. So if you had five and you got ten, that was a good return for your investment.

[10:41] The men who invested their five and their two managed to double their investment and when the master returned, he said, well done, you good and faithful servant and gave them the same amount again to invest.

So the person with five ended up with ten and the person with two ended up with four. But then there's the third man, the dull man. Verse 24.

Then the man who had 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. See, here is what belongs to you.

Now, I think in a sense he did fail to understand the motivation of his master.

Because the master seems to be very kind and very generous. He allows considerable space and freedom for his servants to work with his assets.

[11:55] But he was a man, presumably. It's why he was a rich man. He had been careful. He did have high standards. Master, here's your money safe and sound.

To be honest, I was more than little afraid. I know you have high standards and hate sloppiness and don't suffer fools gladly. So I hid your money so that it wouldn't be stolen.

Do you ever use your inadequacy as an excuse for doing nothing? Oh, I'm just so ordinary, so simple.

I can't really make a difference. So it's probably best not to do anything. Maybe you've been asked to help a person or to perform a task. But you just kind of feel, well, I don't know if I'd really make a difference.

So you don't do anything about helping that person. You don't do anything about fulfilling that task. It's simply left undone. Someone has said that faith risks failure in a life of obedience.

[13:03] Disobedience. The basic sin for the Christian is not failure, but disobedience. There is great mercy displayed by God to those who have sought to live for him, but maybe haven't necessarily always got it right.

The Lord looks to us in great kindness in our weakness.

But the Lord does not look with favour upon our willfulness. The basic sin for the Christian is not failure, but disobedience.

Always since the beginning of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew, when he tells the story of the wise and foolish builders at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, it is very plain that it is practising the words of Jesus, which Jesus is looking for in his followers.

And here we have an example of someone who does not practise the word of his master. Verse 28.

So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.

[14:28] 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.

This is the final act of teaching that Jesus gives before he goes to the cross. It's a really important statement of what he values, what he's looking for in people.

He looks for faithfulness. The final part of this chapter, the section about the sheep and the goats, has got kind of parabolic elements to it, but it's not, strictly speaking, a parable.

It is a highly parabolised slab of teaching that gives us a picture of what the final judgment will look like.

There from verse 31. Can you imagine the scene? All that's been hidden about Jesus is suddenly revealed in a flash of glory.

[15:47] His true worth is seen at last. Glory. The magnificent beauty of Jesus now revealed for all to see. When the Son of Man comes in all his glory and all the angels of heaven with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

Just imagine it. The king who was born in poverty and obscurity as a baby in Bethlehem. The one despised and rejected by men. The one who had been mocked and spat upon and crucified is now on the throne.

That would be spectacular. Genuinely awesome. History is heading towards a climax. This is the climax. All nations will be gathered before him.

This is the end of history. Forget the World Cup. Forget the Olympics. This is the most astonishing international gathering that there's ever been. Yet the mood of that day will not be the same for everybody.

That day will represent a great divide. The immense figure of Jesus, whose birth split history in two, who has divided world opinion ever since.

[17:00] Those who are for Jesus or against Jesus. He is a figure that we cannot ignore. He is a figure that we all must reckon with.

On that day, he will separate the people from one another. As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Verse 32. He will put the sheep on the right and the goats on the left. Sheep. That's the classic biblical description of a believer.

Jesus in John 10, 27 and 28 said, My sheep, listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand.

To those on the right, the king says, Come. Come, you are blessed by my father.

[18:06] Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. Come. Come. Come. God wants people to experience unimaginable joy and the inheritance that God has been preparing since the beginning of human history, since before the beginning of human history.

God wants us to live, really live, live with joy and security, live with the future, live the flourishing life rather than the reduced life. The king gives a reason for this invitation.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me.

I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Verses 35 and 36.

The background for this may well be Isaiah 58 verse 7, in which the prophet speaks about real fasting and true religion.

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? When you see the naked to clothe him and not turn away from your own flesh and blood.

[19:27] The righteous say, Lord, when did we do this? And they mirror the words that Jesus speaks.

When did we share food with you? It illustrates the biblical view of reward.

The righteous were not calculating. They did not want to earn a reward with their love. They're not keeping a record or trying to earn brownie points.

And it's a reminder that when our hearts are changed, we do the things that change people do. We don't think about every action. These are the things that we do.

When God changes a heart, virtue becomes a second nature. It is what we do. We don't draw attention to it. We get on with it and hardly notice what we're doing.

[20:32] But someone notices what we're doing. Jesus notices what we're doing. The king will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

The son of man who comes in glory at the end is present in every moment of human life. He is the unseen guest at every meal.

He is present in every circumstance and aware of every action. They were unaware that their actions in serving one another, serving the vulnerable, were in fact doing something beautiful for Jesus.

The judge did not know that in reality they have shown their acts of charity to Jesus himself. Jesus is affected by what people do to one another.

Remember how in Acts, Acts chapter 9, Saul of Tarsus, cries out to the one who is stopping him in his tracks and the reply comes, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

[21:52] Proverbs 19, verse 17 says, he who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and will be rewarded for what he has done.

Our actions are seen, they are seen especially by Jesus who sees all. Then the king turns to the left and utters the chilling word depart, verse 41.

The fire is not made for men and women. It's not their natural habitat. It is the fire prepared for the devil and his angels. This is not where we belong.

We are made for life. Yet many choose death. The king repeats the words, I was hungry and you gave me nothing.

And again there is the expression of surprise. Lord, when? Do you wonder that they are surprised? Is it possible to walk through life and simply not see what is in front of our eyes to adopt an attitude that couldn't care less because it is careless?

[23:20] The question in verse 34 when continues the no of these people towards Jesus. We never saw you. When did we see you?

When did we do this? When did we not do this? There is a contrast with the reply of the righteous in verses 37 to 39 where they mirror the words of the question of the king here at the final judgment the accused respect the words of the king so little that they abbreviate them they shorten what's said it's an attitude to the king and an attitude to his word which is careless not even thinking about exactly what is being said to them and what has been demanded of them as we said this is the final act of teaching that Jesus offers before he goes to the cross and it echoes very powerfully those words at the end of the sermon on the mount it is about practicing the words of Jesus we have the solemn words at the end of this chapter

I tell you the truth whoever will whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me then they will go away to eternal punishment and the righteous to eternal life life this is the climax of the teaching of Jesus before he goes to the cross one commentator says so brief the words so tremendous the realities that they state he lays before his hearers the way of life or loss lasting life or lasting loss the full entrance into the flourishing life that God is preparing for his people or a lasting loss that tears away all hope where and how will you spend eternity what have you done for Jesus lately this judgment arises out of the ordinary actions of everyday lives someone has said that we are all judged every day we are judged by the face that looks back at us from the bathroom mirror we are judged by the faces of the people we love we are judged by the faces of the people of the people that we do not love every day finds us at the junction of many roads and we are judged as much by the roads we have not taken as by the roads we have what have you done for Jesus lately in what way have you demonstrated that you are a follower of Jesus

Christ of course all of the things that Jesus says here about the king and the sheep and the goats is transformed by the cross the story of the cross which is to follow in Mark's gospel there on the cross we see him hungry thirsty naked a prisoner for us nothing in my hand I bring simply to your cross I cling naked come to you for dress helpless come to you for grace it is the works of the man on the cross that save us it is his taking our sins upon himself that leads to our forgiveness it is his being judged in our place that leads to our justification but the evidence that we have been rescued is that when Jesus finds us and saves us we change we are saved by grace we are judged by actions the Jesus of the cross says follow me

Paul writes to the Roman Christians in Romans chapter 2 about this very reality Romans 2 verse 5 but because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart you're storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed God will give to each person according to what he has done to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory honour and immortality he will give eternal life but those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger what have we done for Jesus lately the day of judgment will not ask us which confession of faith we subscribe to the final judgment will not primarily ask us about our words of confession it will ask us about our actions what actions have you performed in taking seriously what you believe about the

[30:07] Lord Jesus Christ it is our actions that demonstrate what we really believe our faithfulness says publicly and openly visibly that we take seriously the truth about Jesus we take seriously what it means to be a follower of Jesus that it's not a matter of words only but a matter of action actions do speak louder than words sometimes people profess faith they profess orthodoxy they profess to be an evangelical they profess to be biblical but their actions deny their profession the final words of

Jesus to us are be real embrace reality embrace the authenticity of truth I am the truth I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me but I'm not simply an add-on to your life I'm not a talisman or a lucky charm I am a real saviour and when I save you I change you I change your motivation your priorities I change your actions I want you to be authentic are you a sheep or a goat are you heading for life or eternal destruction let's pray

Jesus now I know that everything counts I will never again suppose that what I do is insignificant I will look for your presence in every person I meet and serve you through them amen let us pray together our gracious heavenly father we thank you for the words that we have heard and the implications that we have heard spelled out please help us to live these days in the light and in the obedience and actions that your word expects of us so now may grace and mercy and peace be with each one of us from God who is father son and holy spirit now and forevermore amen and we'll play out looking forward to that great day when he comes there is a day that all creation's waiting for so it's goodbye from me and enjoy the music there is a day that all creation's waiting for a day of freedom and liberation for the earth and on that day the lord will come to meet his bride and when we see him in an instant we'll be changed the trumpet sounds and the dead will then be raised by his power never to perish again once only flesh now clothed with immortality death is now being swallowed up in victory we will meet him in the air and then we will be like him for we will see him as he is oh yeah then all hurt and pain will cease and we'll be with him forever and in his glory we will live oh yeah oh yeah so lift your eyes to the things as yet unseen that will remain now for all eternity though troubles hard it's only moment dream and it's achieving our future glory we will meet him in the air and then we will be like him for we will see him as he is oh yeah then all hurt and pain will cease and we'll be with him forever and in his glory we will live oh yeah oh yeah too