

The Praise we've all been looking for

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[0 : 00] Good morning, brothers and sisters. I'm going to be reading from Matthew chapter 25, from verse 14 to 30. For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.

So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now after a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward bringing the five talents more, saying, Master, you delivered to me five talents.

Here I have made five talents more. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little.

[1 : 20] I will set you over much. Enter into the glory of your master. And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, Master, you delivered to me two talents.

Here I have made two more talents. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed.

So I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours. But his master answered him, You wicked and slothful servant.

You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have invested the money with the bankers. And at my coming, I should have received what was my own with interest.

[2 : 23] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance.

But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness, in that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Well, good morning, everyone. Will you please pray with me as we come to God's word. Father, I pray that you would help us to anticipate the day when you send your son back into this world.

When we see him in glory. And Lord, I pray that you would fill our hearts with your word this morning and anticipate the delight of that day that's coming.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what motivates a Christian to serve Jesus? What motivates a Christian?

[3 : 32] I believe, at least, our motives are always mixed. Mine are, at least. Like pure gold with impure alloys.

I think our motives are always mixed. Please, don't go searching for pure motives in yourself. It's coming. It's called heaven. It's going to be incredibly pure.

I'm looking forward to that day. But I just want to look at a few common motives, at least I find in my own heart.

It's not an exhaustive list. One is social pressure to serve Jesus. Someone taps you on the shoulder. Hey, have you signed up to church cleaning?

And your heart just bursts. Oh, I want to love you, Jesus. Now, church cleaning, it's easy to pick on that one because, let's face it, none of us want to do it.

[4 : 32] Social pressure. We fear the consequences of saying no, and we just say yes. You remove that pressure. Suddenly, the motivation disappears as well.

Another motivation that sometimes is in us Christians is the fear of not measuring up. And this is a comparison thing.

We're not measuring up to other Christians. We want to make sure we've done enough to prove our faith is real. But the cross of Jesus drives that fear out over the course of our life.

We're not meant to be gathering more fruits to prove ourselves. We're meant to be putting our roots deeper down into knowing Jesus is enough.

So social pressure, fear of not measuring up. Another common one is self-affirmation, self-glory. To bolster my sense of worth.

[5 : 37] Again, it's a comparison game we play with other Christians, other churches. It's in contradiction to what we sing.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom. I will boast in Jesus Christ. We can sometimes rank.

This service of Jesus is more important than this service. It's just not true. And then when we feel like we succeed, we feel like a somebody for a little bit.

And when we fail, we feel crushed. I'm a nobody. It's what drove Madonna, the predecessor to Taylor Swift. She said in a Vanity Fair interview in the 1918...

1918. Not quite that old. 1980s. She admitted that she didn't feel like anyone special.

[6 : 39] Madonna. When I achieve a new level of fame and accomplishment, for a brief moment I feel special. Then I have to reach further.

There's a Christian version of this. We serve to just fill that void to make sure to feel like I'm someone special.

Now, others say, other Christians say, our motivation should simply be doing our duty of what is right. Any sense of inner satisfaction, that good job Alex was talking to the kids about, is suspected as pride.

You're suddenly making it about yourself. We don't know what to do with people saying good job. It's like, don't make it about me.

We do have duty to serve Jesus. We're going to see that in the passage. It sounds humble to say, I don't need a pat on the back.

[7 : 52] It sounds humble, but it's not the most humble. It's not childlike. For the Christian, there's another motivation to serve Jesus.

And it's truly humble. It's childlike. Brothers and sisters, you know it already. You've tasted it. We want more of it. And we're going to see it in our passage this morning.

It's a very gracious motivation we're given. Now, I'm not going to tell you what it is yet, because I want you to actually keep listening to me for a few more minutes.

So just to ground us a bit where we're up to in Matthew's gospel, we're a matter of days from Jesus going to the cross.

We're going to tell you what it is. He's preparing his disciples to live well, to be faithful in the light of his second coming. We don't know the day or hour.

[8 : 53] So like Mad Eye Moody, we're meant to be constantly vigilant. We're meant to be spiritually awake. he gives us five pictures, five parables to help us see how we're meant to live in light of his return.

We saw three of these last week. Like a thief in the night, we're to live conscious that his coming could be at any day or hour. We're just to be conscious of that.

Like servants, fellow servants put in charge of other servants in a household, we're all servants, but some have a different authority. We're to use any authority we've got, knowing, conscious, we're going to give an account to our master.

And the third picture was the ten women who were waiting for the wedding feast. Five were wise because they took preparations ready to endure because it could be a long time.

It's not a sprint. They took preparations for it could be our lifetime. We prepare for the next generation of churches. So there's the three pictures.

[10 : 12] We're going to look at the fourth this morning and then the fifth next week. Today, the picture is, the point is, we're to be like slaves and trusted to increase our master's assets.

We're to be busy. Now, if we make these five parables a checklist to see if we qualify for the kingdom, we're all going to fall short.

That's not the point of these parables. The point of these is like a parent sitting down with their child going, think of it like this. Using things the child knows to help them think about the situation right. That's what he's doing. He's preparing us. He's training us. The more we have these perspectives, the more our faithfulness will grow and grow over time.

This isn't a checklist. He's motivating us to be faithful. So getting into the parable then. Slaves in the ancient world are very different from modern slavery.

[11 : 28] They could have great social status and privilege depending on who their master was. They could be school teachers. They could be accountants.

They could be put in charge of many people. Jesus using slavery as a metaphor is not endorsing the institution any more than him using thievery in the night.

He's endorsing, oh, great, yeah, let's keep stealing. He's just using something familiar in the time to get a point across. Now, the point in the story, this master is wealthy.

He's a very wealthy household. He's going on a journey for a long time and he entrusts a lot to three slaves, three servants. Now, talent. Don't think Australia's got talent when you hear talent.

Talent is a unit of measure. Think tonne. It's not exactly a tonne. I'm not saying that's the exact measurement.

[12 : 31] But think a tonne of silver coins or a tonne of gold coins. So it would have been six...

If it was silver, it would have been 6,000 denarii and one denarii was a day's wages. This is 20 years' wages in one talent.

So I just did some quick calculations. Let's say a tradie earns 70 grand per annum. The one talent is entrusting \$1.4 million.

He's entrusting a lot. That's just the one talent, let alone the five talent. And each is entrusted according to their ability. The one with five talents, \$7 million, he went at once and he traded with it. Now, that's not like the stock market where he just hoped he backed a good horse. He went and did business with it. He put it to work.

[13 : 40] He probably started his own business. And if you have started your own business, if you're a sole trader or whatever, he's working day and night. To get it established.

He's working with it. He's investing it for the long term. And he's doing it passionately, knowing he's increasing his master's assets, not his own.

And I think he's... The picture I'm seeing in here, see if you agree with me or not. He seems like this proud child coming before his parent. Here, look what I did. With what you gave me.

And likewise, the one who gets two talents, millions of dollars, remember, he gets just as busy. He, too, is filled with the privilege of the task given to him to build up his master's property.

I think our heads turn a bit when we hear someone who has a pretty cool job. I think of our brother, our Christian brother, John Anderson, who came to speak at the men's conference once.

[15 : 03] He was once a deputy prime minister. We got a better turn up. Or Sinclair Ferguson, he's a Scottish preacher.

He got to preach to the Queen. Some school students thought my dad worked for NASA. He couldn't convince him that that wasn't true.

But our heads turn, don't they, when we're like, whoa. The one who's coming back in glory, we're working for him.

He's entrusted to us. His kingdom. The Christian, it should be a profound privilege to be called a slave of Christ.

Paul thought so. It's the attitude of Paul when he was close to dying in Philippians. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[16 : 09] If I am to live in the body, that means fruitful labour for me. Huge privilege.

Now, the third servant in this story, he's been given a job to do. And he digs a hole and puts \$1.4 million in a hole.

Verse 24 and following. Master, I knew you to be a hard man. Reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seeds, so I was afraid.

I think he saw himself in a lose-lose situation. If he tried to invest his master's money and got a return on his efforts, he doesn't get the reward. This is no business deal of 50-50. All the profits go 100% to the master.

Where's the incentive in that? He gets the glory. He gets the profit. But if he has a go and he fails, I think he's fearing he will get the blame.

[17 : 26] Lose-lose. He sees his master as not sharing in the hard work. His master isn't the one in the field sweating all day.

He's just gone off on a journey. Expects a return when he comes. He believes his master is a hard man. Doesn't share the sweat and blood of the hard work.

Succeeds. He gets all the credit. Fail. You get the blame. Now, the master's response in verse 26 and 27. He is not agreeing that he is, in fact, a hard man.

He's not agreeing. He's going, okay, let's use your logic for a second. You think I'm a hard man. Why didn't you just do the bare minimum and wait in line at the bank for a few hours and just be in the bank?

You did nothing. Nothing at all. Totally disobedient to the job I gave you. You didn't even do the bare minimum by your own logic.

[18 : 40] This parable, I don't think, is don't ask the question, am I doing enough? It's not getting us to ask that question.

This wicked servant didn't do a thing. Not a thing. The master was away for a long time.

This is not a momentary favour. He could have changed his mind, dug up the money and had a go.

This is a long, lifetime settled attitude towards his master.

He's a hard man. That's his root problem. I knew you to be a hard man. Now, before we get to Jesus at this point, if we just look at the master in this story, it's a fantasy to see his master as contributing nothing.

He's invested everything. He's entrusted 1.4 million to you. He seems to fear the master's failure.

[19 : 59] Now, I'm going to use a bit of poetic license here, okay? It's not in the text. But who knows? If he had a go and he lost it all, the master could have just gone, that's okay, he had a go.

I knew the risk I was taking. Here, here's another talent. Have another go. Now, that's not in the text. But what we are told in verse 15, the master distributed each according to his ability.

The servant could have gone, I don't back myself. I'm afraid of failing. But my master backs me. I don't know why, but he's backing me.

And does this master really take all the profit? Yes, he does. But then he shares it all with his servants. Come. Come, enter into the joy of your master.

He has this view of the master that is just wrong. It's not who his master is. Now, I think we all fall sometimes into thinking God is a hard, a hard man, a hard taskmaster.

[21 : 16] He's demanding all, giving nothing. Well, if you're like me at least, I fall into that thinking. Jesus had to die to cleanse us of that thinking.

It's possible to see the world, the problems in the world and the hardship of life, the discouragement in the church and just, God, your heart, you ask a lot of me and you don't really care about me and you don't care about us.

You don't give anything. You want all the glory in the end. It's possible to fall into that. But it's his word.

It's prayer. It's often my brothers and sisters who snap me out of that thinking by pointing back to Jesus. This servant, I think, represents someone, not someone who slips into that thinking.

We all slip into it. This is a settled, decades-long, lifetime-long view of God. Just demanding.

[22 : 34] If that's your lifetime view of God, you're in real danger because you don't know him. Know who he's like.

If you were to sum up Matthew's Gospel with one verse from Matthew's Gospel, I'll choose chapter 20, verse 28. I think that summarises the whole Gospel.

Even the Son of Man did not come to be served. Did not come to be served. But to serve you.

To be a slave for you. And give his life as a ransom for many. That's the character of this master we have.

I hope I pronounced this right, but I always fear mispronouncing this, but in Les Miserables. Is that right? Almost? Not quite.

[23 : 46] Yeah, I got it wrong. Lay miserables. How about that? Jean Valjean. He's been imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his starving five-year-old niece.

He gets five years in prison, but he ends up serving 19 years because he keeps trying to escape.

He gets caught. He eventually goes out on parole. He's just hardened by this point of the injustice in

his life.

And he comes to the bishop. And he comes to the bishop. And Bishop Muriel gives him food and drink and a place to stay.

And he's just touched by the mercy that he's never found in life. But then he steals the bishop's silver and runs away.

But he gets caught, dragged back to the bishop. And the bishop says, I gave it to him.

[24 : 58] Here, you forgot these two candlesticks as well. And that costly price that the bishop pays to set Jean Valjean free from prison, it changes him forever.

He says after this, one word from him and I'll be back beneath the lash upon the rack.

Instead, he offers me my freedom. I feel my shame inside me like a knife. He told me that I have a soul.

How does he know? What spirit comes to move my life? Is there another way? Is there another way to go? Jean Valjean is forever changed by this mercy.

He can't stay the same. He's a prisoner now to this mercy. And he spends the rest of his life showing this same mercy to others.

[26 : 07] He's so deeply changed by this mercy. Our master has paid our ransom to set us free from the hardness. And the self-absorption.

And the sin and death. If you taste the mercy of God in Christ, you're changed. Now, we're not as changed as we want to be, but you are changed. You can't be the same ever again.

You're a slave to his mercy now. You're never going to be released and you don't want to be released. If you know this master and what he paid, you've got no problem being called his servant.

You're a servant. You're a servant. You're a servant. More than that, you know a joy precisely because you're a servant.

If you were just business partners, you wouldn't have a joy that comes from this master, which brings us to the reward of the two faithful servants in verse 20 to 23.

[27 : 15] Now, many believers have found these verses very moving. It's a moving promise of reward. You've heard it at funerals.

And here we come to the great motivation Jesus gives us to serve him. Well done, good and faithful servant.

You've been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. Why? Why is it so moving to anticipate hearing the Lord speak that over your life? Shouldn't it be demeaning?

Servant. That's all you are, a servant. I don't find that demeaned. Isn't it a bit tame? You've been faithful. It's not, wow, you did more than others.

[28 : 26] No. It's not, you made something out of nothing. No. I couldn't have done it without you. No, it's just, you've been faithful. Why is that so moving?

I think our problem is we distort a right and proper desire for praise. And we try and get it from others, comparing ourselves to others.

But it's C.S. Lewis in his, he wrote a paper called The Weight of Glory, who really helped me to understand. The most humble thing, the most childlike desire is to be praised by the one who it's your duty to please.

That's what a child wants. To have their mum and dad look at them and go, you went out of your way to be kind to your sibling.

I'm so proud of you. You said sorry. Well done, buddy. You did the job before I even asked.

[29 : 46] Good job. You included that kid who was left out. To look you in the eye and say, I'm proud of you. Well done.

I think that's the praise we've all been looking for. Let me just read a bit of C.S. Lewis. In the end, that face, which is the delight or the terror of the universe, must be turned upon each of us, either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured.

Now, please hear this. It is only possible by the work of Christ that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination and shall find approval, shall please God.

To please God. To be a real ingredient in the divine happiness. To be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in, as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son.

To be a real ingredient in the divine happiness.

[31 : 17] The one who it's our duty to please, taking pleasure in you, it fills our soul with joy. Now, you may not feel like God will be able to find anything good in you or anything unfaithful in your life, when it's revealed on that day, it's going to be to the praise of his grace.

We've got nothing to fear. Nothing can be revealed that the cross of Jesus hasn't paid for. It's just going to be, we're going to be praising Jesus. And then the things we have been faithful by his power, it's going to be well done.

Now, you may not believe he's going to find anything, but this is where we've got to accept his word, rather than what you feel. That is the praise we've all been looking for, and we're going to get it. And it's the most childlike thing to desire it. And part of our reward in the eternal age is we're going to be given increased opportunities.

You've been faithful with a little bit in this life. Here, I'm going to set you over much. It's still his, but we've got increasing opportunity to know his pleasure in us, in being faithful.

[32 : 42] I think anticipating his pleasure in you on that final day is truly humble. We were originally designed for it as the image bearers.

And I think it gives us power to be faithful now. If you anticipate that pleasure, his face smiling is coming. Because it's got nothing to do with comparing yourself to others.

The five and the two talents, they get exactly, word for word, the same pleasure. It has nothing to do with comparison. Nothing. Anticipating his pleasure in you will heal you of any inferiority to others that you feel.

It heals, it smashes your pride. People's praise won't be as intoxicating anymore.

It doesn't sway you to do what's going to please them because you know the true praise you're after. People's criticism or rejection can't crush you anymore.

[34 : 07] It can only be used by him to keep you faithful. It's useful to getting more praise, his praise. I know I quote him a lot, but Tim Keller.

You are absolutely and totally adopted, accepted, loved, treasured and delighted in by the only person in the whole universe whose opinion counts and whose opinion will last.

That keeps you faithful to him. It will sustain you when you can't see any fruit of your labours.

Your hardship, your pain will be worth it in the end. I think it keeps you grounded. Even in the Christian world, we like, oh, here's the best way to do church.

No, here's the best way to do church. No, here's the... No, you're grounded because you're like, what do you say, God? I want your praise. Anticipating his smiling face empowers us to be faithful.

[35 : 22] It's his praise I've all been looking for and it's coming. And anticipating that keeps us faithful. John Calvin used one verse to describe the Christian life.

2 Corinthians 5.15 He died for all that those who lived might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

That's the Christian and I think that's what we're seeing in this parable. So I want to finish by asking the question you've probably been wanting me to answer for a while now.

What do these talents represent? We've got the picture, but what do they represent in Christian service now? Like always with parables, I think we've got to be careful again.

Don't narrowly allegorise. It must mean this small thing. There's one point. Slaves of Jesus who've been forever changed by his mercy, we know his commission and he's entrusted us to just be busy building his kingdom assets.

[36 : 41] That's our orientation to life. With all that we are and all that we have. Any situation. I know we don't make the use, like as soon as I say that, I think of all the times I haven't made use of the opportunities.

But he's telling us this to motivate us. Time is short. Anticipate my praise. Get busy with my kingdom. It's going to look different for each of us.

Faithfulness will look different for every servant. What will it look like to use our money to increase our master's assets, not my own assets?

It's going to look different for each of us. There will be some overlap, of course. Ambition.

What's your ambition? Ambition is fine. It's good. But make it count. Be ambitious for what your master cares about.

[38 : 00] It says it is truly worthwhile. How can you use your retirement? Not for the Australian dream. But, as Don likes to say, like, die with your boots on.

In his service. Thinking about your job, whatever job you have. It's not thinking I'm a school teacher, I'm a disability carer who happens to be a Christian.

It's the other way around. I'm a Christian in his service and I just happen to be a school teacher.

How can I use this for his namesake, for the good of others?

It'll change your career choices, probably. Like, I heard of one high-flying guy who travelled the world, high job, high status job, lots of money.

And he traded it all in to invest in his local church youth group and his family. Great choice. It'll change what you think is valuable.

[39 : 15] Now, to balance that out, he might have stayed in that job because he thought that was the best way to serve Jesus. I don't know. I don't want to be too prescriptive for you.

I just want to ask lots of questions. How do you use your hardships and chronic sickness and loss to show others around you, you've got a hope in someone that this world doesn't know?

What conflicts, relational conflicts have you got? You can advance the reconciling power of the gospel rather than your own desire for justice.

Safety. It may look like you're exhausted after a long week and you're watching your kids sport with a coffee in hand.

You just want to be left alone. But the other parent next to you engages you in conversation and you might be the only sincere Christian they know.

[40 : 16] And so you're like, okay, this is an opportunity. I just want to relax, but I'm in the service of Jesus. It will look like caring for world missions.

It will be an anxiety for those who don't know him yet. But he sees that text message you send to encourage a fellow saint. He sees your private prayer.

For those who don't know him yet. He sees when you visit the sick. Even if you give a glass of water. He sees.

Our service will look different. Don't worry about who you think has five talents. Your idea of five talents and his idea might be very different anyway. William Wilberforce, who ended the slave trade in Britain.

He once said, If you have health and ability or the wealth, no person has a right to be idle in a world such as this. That they may not find some ignorance to instruct.

[41 : 34] Some wrong to redress. Some want to supply. Some misery to alleviate. It will look very different.

But anticipate that day when the one who shed his blood to cover all our unfaithfulness, that face of the universe looks you in the eye. And says, Well done.

Well done. Good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little here. I'm going to set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. What a gracious motivation he's given us.

To serve you. So let's use all that we are and all that we have. Every circumstance he puts us in for his service. Will you pray with me?

Let's pray. Father, fill us.

[42 : 48] Let's conquer any doubt in our mind or any counterfeit alternative that we've got. So that we might anticipate the day when you look over our life and say, Well done.

Good and faithful servant. We praise you for your grace and your goodness that you actually take pleasure in your servants.

Please fill us with this motivation more so that we might be faithful to you individually and as a church. In his name I pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.