

Living in the light of Jesus' return

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[0 : 00] And today's reading is taken from Matthew chapter 25 and it can be found on page 1001 of the church Bibles.

So that's Matthew chapter 25 starting at verse 14 and reading through to verse 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.

[1 : 09] And he who had received the five talents came forward bringing 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. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

He also who had received the one talent came forward saying, Master, you delivered to me two talents. Here I have made two talents more.

His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. 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.

[2 : 13] 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 my money with the bankers. And at my coming, I should have received what was my own with interest.

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, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Good morning, everyone.

Thanks, Laura. Let's pray as we begin. Father, we pray that you would humble us now before you and before your word and help us.

[3 : 24] We pray to hear what you're saying to us this morning by the power of your spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, we're strange in England, aren't we?

We say New Year is January. That's what we say. But really, I think for most of us, for many of us, it feels like the New Year is September.

So deeply ingrained in our bones, probably from school. And so as we begin this year, I thought it would be good to... This is just a one-off talk in the Parable of the Talents.

Next week, we're going to be starting a series in Mark's Gospel, going all the way through the first half of Mark this year. But I thought it would be good to begin the year. It's a pretty good place to begin by looking to the return of the Lord Jesus.

I don't know how you're feeling. Some of us may be feeling like there are so many pressures as we come back, maybe from holidays, that we're almost feeling overwhelmed. Some of us might be feeling quite low.

[4 : 29] Some of us might be feeling nice and refreshed. We're feeling like how many of you look this morning. Glad to be back. Well, I think however we're feeling, this is what we need to lift our eyes to the return of the Lord Jesus.

The Bible says the Lord Jesus is going to return, the Lord of the universe. This year, therefore, is like any other year, at the end of which, or before the end of which, the Lord Jesus might return to call time on history.

Every year that goes by is one year closer to the day when all who have put their trust in Christ will at long last enter into that long-prepared, everlasting kingdom.

As Jesus refers to it here, verse 21, the joy of our master, the eternal joy. What a day that will be, to be home, at rest, life, the crown, every tear wiped away.

No more doubting, no more sin. Not more secure, but more happy. Well, how should we live in the meantime?

[5 : 48] What will it mean for us to press on towards that day as we carry on this year? I thought we could do a lot worse than start with the parable of the talents.

Because in the parable of the talents, Jesus spells out what does it mean to live faithfully, waiting for him to return. What should this year be all about if we want to be faithful to our Lord?

I've got two points for us today. What does it mean to live faithfully, to wait faithfully? Firstly, the faithful servant says, your work is my privilege and devotes their life to it.

Just look down at verse 14 to 17 again. 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.

[7 : 01] So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. A talent was worth a lot of money.

So a talent back in the first century was a measure of silver, around about 30 kilograms. I don't know if you could lift that. Some of us could, perhaps. worth \$300,000 in 1984, which was the book I was reading, was written in 1984.

So whatever that translates to now, that's quite a lot more, isn't it? This is a hefty wodge of property. The master, therefore, gives real responsibility to each of these servants.

Five times 300,000. I did this, this maths before I came here, I think is one and a half million dollars. And then 600,000, then 300,000.

It's a hefty wodge of property, real responsibility to each of these servants. Now notice what the faithful servants do in verse 16. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them.

[8 : 14] Those words at once, immediately. You see, there is an eagerness there to go out and make profit for their master's business. And where it says he traded with them, literally, he worked with them or he put them to work.

Okay, so this wasn't just about putting them in the bank for perhaps 5% interest, if that could be had. Actually, that would take, I think, 15 years it would take to get the five talents more, which a long journey is not going to take 15 years.

And actually, that's the least they could have done, as we see with the other servant, to put it in the bank and get interest from it. So it's not talking about just putting it in the bank. The picture, rather, is of these two servants making their master's business their business.

They traded, they bought and sold and bought and sold and bought and sold. They said, in effect, your work is my privilege.

And they devoted themselves to it. There was no dragging of feet. There was no reluctance, but an eager desire to make profit for their master's gain.

[9 : 30] Now, clearly, Jesus is the master, going away and then coming back. Talking about his going back to the Father and then returning to claim his kingdom.

And so we need to ask the question, what then is his work? What are his interests and his business? If we're going to understand what this is actually going to mean for us.

I think that is clear in the context. If you just come with me to the very end of Matthew's gospel, the conclusion of the whole gospel.

Chapter 28, verse 18. Jesus, risen from the dead, came to his disciples and said, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. It seems clear that the master's business that he has entrusted to his people is the business of going and making disciples of all nations.

[10 : 38] After all, Jesus did not send his disciples back to their fishing boats with the mission of becoming the best fishermen they could be. He commissioned them into his work.

The work of salvation of people before his return. As he called them back in chapter 4, verse 19, he says, I will make you fishers of men. So if the master's business is to make disciples of all nations, what then do the talents represent?

I take it they represent the resources that each individual disciple has been given that can be put to work for the profit of the master's business, which is to go and make disciples of all nations.

We're talking, therefore, about gifts, personality, opportunities, money, time, intellect, energy, training, absolutely everything that can be put behind the work of the master's business to go and make disciples of all nations.

These gifts, I take it, therefore, are given in different measure to different people. Five, two, one. There has been confusion around this, I think, in the past because our English word talent, meaning natural ability, has actually developed out of this ancient meaning, which was just a weight, a sum of money.

[12 : 16] This has led to misinterpretations of this parable to suggest that what Jesus is saying here is that you need to pursue your talents, your gifts for the glory of God's gifts for the glory of God.

If you're a talented musician, then do that to the best of your ability, maximize that talent to the glory of God, be the best violinist that you can be.

That's one of the ways that this has been taken. I think that is a misunderstanding, because it is a simple misunderstanding of the original meaning of the word, which was a sum of money.

What the talents represent is all the resources given to a person that may be used to maximize profit for the Lord's work of making disciples of all nations.

So let's think about this. It may mean that I use my gift of music, if I have a gift of music, or whatever, but for a different purpose now.

[13 : 15] It is not for my own sake, or for the sake of musical achievement in itself, or for the sake of becoming the best musician I can be for the glory of God, but rather for the sake of other people finding salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? If this world is passing away, which it is. If Jesus, the Lord of the universe, is returning soon, which he is.

If in this age, God is gathering his elect, it makes perfect sense. Take all your resources and put them behind the work of making disciples of all nations.

Let's take a few examples. I know a guy, some of you might know him actually, a guy called John Moody. He used to be in a pretty successful band in the 90s. They did play Glastonbury. You may not have heard of them.

I couldn't remember the name of the band, but they were pretty good. And he became a Christian. And now what does he do with his extraordinary guitar playing ability?

[14 : 22] He plays in his church band a lot, and gives himself to the quality of the music as he helps people to sing to the Lord Jesus.

I think of another guy, Junior Kanadu, who used to play football for Macclesfield Town and didn't quite make it, I don't think, as a professional footballer, but a really excellent player.

What's he doing now with his gift, his talent? Well, he's working in East London, and he's running a football training, a weekly football training thing for kids in East London, and he gives them a gospel talk at halftime.

Actually, I have a friend who's an excellent viola player who trained at the Royal Academy, and he became a Christian as a student. But for him, maximizing the talents that the Lord has given him has actually, as far as I can tell, has meant giving up his viola playing entirely.

I think the viola's probably sitting in a cupboard somewhere and heading into Christian ministry. Why? Because the call of the Lord Jesus on our lives is not to be the best whatever it is we can be.

[15 : 36] That would be for us and for our profit, really. But it's to marshal all the resources that he's given us for his profit, which is the work of making disciples of all nations.

The faithful servant says to Jesus their Lord, who they love, the faithful servant says, your work is my privilege. Of course they do.

What a wonderful, what a good, what a right response to Jesus, who we love, if we are truly his. Your work is my privilege. And then they devote their resources to it in a radical redirection of everything we've been given.

I bring everything I have. I lay it at your feet, Lord, for your work. It does mean questions like, what am I doing with my money? After all, the talent was a sum of money.

If it's not talking about money, then it's not talking about anything. It has actually been a, wonderfully, there's been a request for more teaching on money from some of you here.

[16 : 41] Well, this is one thing we can begin to say from the talent, from the parable of talents. For some of us, maybe for most of us, we've been given a lot more than your average in terms of finances.

It's not ours. It's the Lord's entrusted to us. One of the main ways, therefore, to be faithful with our money in light of this parable is to give it away towards ministry that is about making disciples of all nations.

Your work, Lord, is my privilege. I know one city worker, he's not here, but he talks about deciding early on with his wife, what do we need to live on, roughly?

This is what we need to live on. Okay, we'll give the rest away, whatever happens in terms of career progression, whatever happens in terms of growth of salary. That was their decision.

Well, that was a decision of the faithful servant, I think. Your work is my privilege. This parable actually, I think, brings a totally new perspective on our secular work while we're there.

[17 : 47] the work that our lives are devoted to is not actually our job or our career, no matter how long we've trained for it or how many hours of exams we've sat, but is the work of the Lord.

One person puts it like this. He says, our secular job is a 50-year company-sponsored mission trip. Well, I think that is the attitude of the faithful servant, don't you, in the parable of the talents?

Your work is my privilege, Lord. I'm devoting myself to that. It becomes the focus of our lives as we wait for him. For some of us, we may want to ask, are our priorities quite right?

Or would now be a great time to repent of holding too closely to a work-related ambition that is more to do with you than to do with the Lord?

Now look at the future for the faithful servant because, boy, is it worth it. Look down at verse 19. Now after a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

[19 : 02] Notice, don't be surprised by the delay of the Lord Jesus to come back. After a long time, he came. Verse 20. And he who had received the five talents came forward bringing 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. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy 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 talents more. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. Well, these are the words that we're living for at the return of Christ.

If I might have those words from Jesus, the Lord of the universe, I can be happy forever, knowing my life was not spent in vain.

[20 : 07] Well done, good and faithful servant. Just a few things to pause on here. Imagine that moment. It's so personal, one to one, with the Lord of the universe, each and every one of his people.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Perhaps we feel those words could never be said of us. you feel like that sometimes, all the time.

Listen to these words from J.C. Ryer, which I personally found very helpful. He says, Christ's servant will discover to his amazement that his master's eye saw more beauty in his efforts to please him than he ever saw himself.

You understand what he's saying? Christ's servant will discover to his amazement that his master's eye saw more beauty in his efforts to please him than he ever saw himself. I think he's right.

The true believer is so conscious of his or her failures and weaknesses. I've squandered so much. I take it we will not quite be able to believe these words could ever be spoken of us until he says them.

[21 : 26] The surprise will be how much he saw unnoticed that we did not. How willingly he loves to commend even the smallest act done for him.

You invited they never came. Well done. I heard those prayers even the half-hearted ones even the quarter-hearted ones.

I heard those prayers for others that you have long forgotten. Well done. Those forgotten hours spent by a mother bringing up her children to know the Lord.

Well done. Those financial sacrifices given to the work of disciple-making big and small you've forgotten them. Well done good and faithful servant.

notice the reward. Notice what Jesus says you have been faithful over a little I will set you over much.

[22 : 31] You see this this harks back to creation. We were made back in Genesis 2 to rule over and to work this creation giving our all for the glory of God.

This lifetime therefore is a little training period for the Christian disciple. A little training period for the new creation and the fulfillment of our humanity in the kingdom of Christ.

In this life he sets us his people over a tiny portion of his work. In the coming kingdom he will set us over much. And part of the joy of the new creation will be perfect responsible rule under the Lord Jesus the work that we were made for.

Notice the equal commendation for both of the one with the five and the two. Very easy to look sideways and think if only I had that person's gifts or personality or whatever.

But it's not about being faithful with somebody else what somebody else has been given. That's for them to work out. It's about being faithful with what we've been given. That's all that matters.

[23 : 43] And we haven't got time to talk about how freeing it is to live for only one opinion the opinion of the Lord Jesus. And to meditate on that will release us from many worries and anxieties.

One opinion matters. How many of our worries spring from what people think of us or will think of us? Only one opinion matters.

It's wonderfully freeing. Well done good and faithful servant. But we must pause on the second half of the parable which is given as a warning.

Secondly the fake servant will be exposed at Jesus' return by zero concern for his work. After all Jesus gives a lot of air time doesn't he to this third servant.

Verse 24 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 went and hid your talent in the ground here have what is yours.

[24 : 54] But his master answered him you wicked and slothful servant you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have scattered no seed then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

Now I think the point is this servant this third servant is a servant in name only. He has no real love for his Lord he doesn't know the Lord Jesus he thinks him to be a hard and harsh master well from everything else we've learnt in Matthew's gospel come to me all who are weary and heavy laden he doesn't know his master he has not surrendered his life to him he is a fake servant a servant in name only and he will be exposed at the return of Jesus to have been a fake actually the fake servant the fake disciple is a massive theme in Matthew's gospel throughout the gospel many will say to me Lord Lord on that day chapter 7 chapter 24 verse 48 if that wicked servant says to himself my master is delayed the fake servant is a massive theme throughout

Matthew's gospel now I think the key to understanding this exchange is to see that in verse 24 where he says I knew you to be a harsh man that is not what he actually believed but is a hastily made up excuse what's really happening is that at the shock of his master's return which he wasn't expecting because he had no love for his master and had never really surrendered his life to him at the shock of his master's return he cobbles together whatever he can the most plausible sounding excuse that he can think of oh I was afraid of you like a child making something up on the spot Jesus then exposes the fact that his excuse is made up in verse 27 because if he was really afraid of the master if that was true he would at least have taken it to the bank verse 27 hiding the talent is not the action of someone who's actually afraid of their harsh master you see so the reality is that he hid it not because he was afraid but because he didn't care about his master or his master's interest at all in all probability he didn't believe his master was ever coming back so what's going on here is that Jesus is saying that on the final day many so-called servants of his will be exposed by the fact that they had zero concern for his work of making disciples of all nations they will be exposed to have been fakes in name only perhaps they went to church perhaps they led a decent life no particular moral scandals they didn't necessarily go off drinking with the world or obviously treat people badly but they just did nothing towards the master's work the making of disciples they hid the talent they used their resources in the end they used their resources only for themselves for their own ambitions projects aims in life yes they had the name of

Christian a follower of Jesus why because they had no love for Jesus and they were not truly his and so therefore Jesus treats them as though they were never his people verse 30 cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth he treats them like those who are his enemies it is right to say I think that if we are worried about being the third servant that is a good sign that we're not because the third servant I don't think would be worried at all but it is also right to say that for someone this may be a day to turn from being a Christian in name only to a life surrendered to him I'm just going to leave us with a couple of implications as I close a couple of implications firstly

I think this should bring us to our knees before the Lord each of us personally Lord your work is my privilege I want to be faithful show me what that means be a great prayer to pray in light of this secondly we shouldn't be surprised that there is a purposeful busyness to the Christian life do we feel precious do we feel busy all the time as we wait for the Lord Jesus to return well if we feel busy that isn't necessarily a bad thing we shouldn't be surprised that there is a purposeful busyness to the Christian life rest will come later this life is to be put to work for him a great question to ask if we're Christian is there an obvious way in which I can increasingly maximize this year what I've been given for the Lord Jesus for his work of making disciples of all nations is there one thing perhaps where we can make progress and

[30 : 49] I'm conscious that not everyone here will call ourselves a Christian well just as I close a word for you if you come to Christ he will forgive you he will bring you back to God he will transform you he will change you and the parable of the talents says he will entrust you with his work until he returns let's pray why don't we just take a moment of quiet ourselves to pray in light of these words of the Lord Amen Para