

Away Day 2022 Talk 1: How can I be ready for Christ's return?

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[0 : 00] They give up, and that's what the parable of the bridesmaids is about, the virgins. In chapter 25, maybe you know the parable. There's five, there's all ten of them, they're waiting for the bridegroom to come, but it's been a bit longer than they'd expected.

And so five of them have planned and have thought, well, it's probably going to be a long while. They're ready for the long haul, they've got loads of oil. Five of them don't have enough oil because they thought, oh, it's only going to be 20 minutes or half an hour, whatever it is.

And so they run out, they weren't ready. And so actually when they've got to scoot off and get some more oil, well, that's when the bridegroom comes. The ones who are prepared for the long haul, they're in the banquet, they're in the kingdom of heaven, and the ones who didn't have enough, who thought it was going to be short, they're on the outside.

They're in hell, as it were. They're not in the kingdom of heaven. And so they're like Christians who burn brightly, to use the oil analogy, in their Christian lives quickly.

You know, oh, excellent. But actually they're not prepared for the fact that actually the Christian life isn't going to be quick. It's actually a long haul. It's lovely to see some grey hairs here that I haven't seen for a long time.

[1 : 03] It's really nice because you're probably prepared for the long haul. And that's what Christian life is. You've got to keep going. So isn't it weird? You can fall off the horse both sides with the return of Jesus. You can think it's going to be so far off that actually you just carry on and do what you want.

Or you can think, well, oh, it's going to be really exciting. And actually you're not prepared for the long haul. And the whole application of all these parables is be ready.

But keep being ready and don't stop. Keep being ready until the day you die if Jesus doesn't come back in your lifetime. It's a life attitude of being ready. And what we want to do this today is to get people back into the readiness.

Are you ready for the return of Jesus? Jesus. That's what these parables are about. Now the parable of the talents that we've just looked at. I've changed my mind on what I think this is about.

I don't do that very often. The parable classically has been taught like this. The way I was taught it anyway. There's the three servants.

[2 : 08] They've got the master. The master gives the first one five talents, the second one two, and the third one one. And those talents represent talents. I mean, I think that's probably where we get the word talent from.

Abilities, opportunities. And Jesus has given you different people. Some are more talented than others. Some are more spiritually gifted than others. And you've got to use your spiritual gifts to make a profit.

And then when the master comes back, well done. You've used the talents that I've given you well. But that's probably because the word talent in our English means talent.

But in Greek, the word doesn't mean talent. It just means a lot of money. In fact, if you've got the same footnotes as me. I can't see the footnotes. This is what happens when you've got the glasses.

What is it saying? Talent. Have you got the footnotes? 20 years wages. Thank you. You've got it at the bottom there. 20 years wages. 20 years wages. So a quick calculation. If the average wage is about 30,000, 20 years wages is about 600 grand.

[3 : 14] 600 grand. Do something with that. Wow. The NIV translates it, not talents. It translates it, bags of gold.

I think that's a helpful translation. But it's not just a bag of gold. But 600 grand. That's one talent. One guy's got five talents. He's got three million quid.

So these aren't just like downstairs in Downton Abbey type servants. These are like stock traders. These are people dealing with big, big sums of money.

Now I don't think, therefore, big sums of money represents abilities. Let me show you some other reasons why I don't think it's about abilities. Look at verse 15.

To one he gave five talents. To another two. To another one. Each according to his ability. So he's giving them money.

[4 : 16] He's looking at them and thinking, this guy can deal with a lot of money. He already has the ability. So I'll give him this responsibility. And so the money actually represents responsibility.

Responsibility. Now in the context of these parables, he's criticising the Pharisees. Particularly in the chapter 23, in the woes of chapter 23.

He's criticising them for being blind guides who prefer money and titles and lots of followers rather than teaching their followers properly.

We've just seen the parable there. Do you remember the wicked servant who beat the other servants and wasn't taking his responsibility of looking out for the others properly? And as we'll see in the next parable, and really, really clearly, on judgment day, he will say, how did you treat my followers?

I think the talent, the money, the bags of gold are responsibility for other Christians. Because that's what's valuable to Jesus.

[5 : 28] So here's the challenge. Jesus has gone away. He could be back soon. He could be back for a long while. And he has given each of us, according to our ability, people to care about, look after.

It might be your children. It might be your growth group. It just might be people in your church. And each of us will be evaluated, judged, on how we cared for and looked for and served and loved and prayed for and evangelised and encouraged and teach other Christians.

Other people. Because that's what's precious. That's what really matters. Let's have a look at the actual text. Jesus rewards those who make a profit. So look at verse 19.

The master comes back after a long time. He's given them the money. And the two faithful servants receive a reward for making a profit.

They both make a profit that works with the deposit that was given to them. The first has made five back from his five. The second, two back from his two. And what is the reward he gives?

[6 : 37] I think there's three rewards that he gives. Now this is worth dwelling on because this is really important. Rewards of honour, responsibility and happiness. So the reward of honour, verse 21.

These are the words to stick up on your bridge. Well done, good and faithful servant. See, these are men who recognise and understand they are servants of the Lord and they've been good and faithful.

That's what Jesus sees. Everyone here cares what other people think of them. And the more important the person, the more important their verdict is. So when not Simon Dowdy is in front of everyone, you're cool.

That is an important verdict. And you remember that. The more valuable the person, the more important the person. But likewise, the opposite is if someone says terrible.

So I always remember, I used to watch X Factor. I don't know if you ever watch X Factor. But X Factor was a ridiculous programme because you had these comedy judges that used to talk. But no one really cared what they thought because it was always about cow.

[7 : 42] What Simon Cowell said was the only verdict that actually mattered. The other guys were garnish. And so it is with Jesus. What Jesus says matters.

Do you know what your boss is? Or even what your spouse says. Your mother says. No, I shouldn't say that. What your spouse says. Sorry, spouse. But really, really one verdict is the only verdict that really matters.

And it's his. And you want to hear those words. Well done, good and faithful servant. Could you just imagine for a moment, just out of your own body for a moment.

Imagine the day when you stand before Jesus and he says, Andrew, well done, good and faithful servant.

Ian, well done, good and faithful servant. It will be that day. Those words will just kind of echo and echo and echo.

[8 : 40] And it's almost the day you will always remember. The day you want the video of. You can always watch back. Because that's the day when it was all worth it.

You were right. You did it right. And that just has an implication. If you're the sort of person that feels down about yourself, or if other people are down about you, just remember it's only Cal's verdict that matters.

The little Irish bloke, I forget his name, it doesn't matter. It's only Jesus' verdict that matters. It doesn't matter what they say, really, ultimately.

If you get well done, good and faithful servant from him, that's the one that counts. Secondly, it's not just honour, but responsibility. So I think this is really where it's going, verse 21, this parable.

You've been faithful with a few things. I'll put you in charge of many things. Just as we have had responsibility for some people, and with what ability we had, we prayed for them and loved them and told them and encouraged them, and we did what we could with this little amount, even though it's got a big amount of money, they're valuable, Jesus gives exponentially more responsibility because the kingdom of heaven is so much bigger and better.

[9 : 56] And in Luke's telling of the same parable, the parable of the miners, you've looked after five talents. I'll give you five cities to be responsible for. It's just exponentially more responsibility because you've been faithful with this thing that was valuable.

I'll give you much, much more. And I take it, therefore, in heaven, there will be people with different levels of responsibility and honour and glory, and it will be absolutely right.

It will be the kingdom where the right people have the right responsibility because they're the trustworthy ones. They're the faithful ones. They're the guys you actually want to be in charge. They're not the people that are good at politics that get in charge or the people that are good at schmoozing or the people that...

No, no, no, no. It's the right people in the right places of responsibility. It'll be a brilliant kingdom. And everyone will go, I'm so glad that God put him at number one and her at them because they're the right people because they're the faithful ones.

They're the lovers. They're the kind ones. They're the servants. And finally, the reward of happiness. Verse 21. Come and share your master's happiness. So in the parable of the bridesmaids, it's the ones in the wedding banquet.

[11:07] I'm going to a wedding later on today, this evening. I'm looking forward to going to it. And weddings are fun places. You cannot not have fun at a wedding. Everyone is happy. Everyone's chatting. Everyone's eating.

Everyone's drinking. That is heaven. Heaven is the... The big picture of heaven is a wedding banquet. It's a place of joy, a place of community, a place of happiness, a place of abundance.

That is heaven. That's often the way it's described. But that happiness is not apart from the bridegroom. It'd be weird to go to a wedding reception and not have the wedding couple there.

That would be bizarre. And he says, come and share your master's happiness. It's happiness because he's there, because he's at the centre. It's happiness with him.

And you know when you see the married couple, there they are, and you're just really happy because they're really happy and that's part of the happiness. And so it is with Jesus. Because he's there and because he's glorious and because he's happy, it just overflows to all of us.

[12:07] And it goes on and on like that. That is what it's like. Happiness. Because Jesus is there and he's happy. And we're with him. And we're sharing his happiness. So that's the, you know, the trustworthy, the faithful and good servants.

But the opposite of good and faithful is wicked and lazy. And that's what we get to in verse 24. So let me read it in verse 24. He also, who had received the one talent, came forward saying, Master, I knew you to be a hard man.

So, see, this guy's been serving Jesus for years, or the Master, for years. And he knew he wasn't doing the job. But he'd already got his excuse set up.

He was ready for this day. He thought he was very, very clever. He'd got his, what he says, 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. Whose fault was it? Whose fault was it that didn't do any work? It's the Master's fault, isn't it? Because he's the hard man. He's difficult. And so, so, and I, so I was afraid of you.

[13:18] Victim. And so I had to bury it in the ground. I did the right thing, because I'm the victim here. You're just a hard man. Here's what yours, I'm kind.

I gave you back what you gave me. I mean, that's fair. I've self-justified it, but I've done nothing to serve you, because I've given you back, you know, the little bit that you gave me.

But his Master answered him, I could say, not good and faithful, but wicked and slothful, lazy, sir. You knew that I reap where I've not sown, gather where I've scattered no seed.

You thought that of me, did you? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and that my coming had received what was my own interest. Now, I don't think he's saying here that that would have been a good thing to have done.

I think he's saying, you have no regard for me. It's what he thought of me that was key. And that's why you didn't even bother to go to the bank and put the money in the bank.

[14 : 16] It wasn't because I'm a hard man. It's because you have no regard for me. And so, therefore, he's thrown out. The real reason is, here's a guy who's a Christian.

He's in a church. He's a servant of the Lord. But he doesn't really honour the Lord very much. And so he doesn't think it's important to make a profit on what's being given to him.

He doesn't think other Christians, the responsibility is there. He's not used to do responsibility. I'll do my own thing. I'll live my own life. Instead of doing the job, I'll do my own job.

I'll look out for my own life. I'll feather my own nest. And I won't bother with his people, which he's given me. And you get the response.

You get the punishment. So there's two punishments, I think, here. The first one is loss. So verse 28. So take the gold from him. Verse 28. I lost myself.

[15 : 26] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has more, who has, more will be given. And he will have an abundance. There's that emphasis again.

But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. There's a season now in life, before the return of Jesus, where you do have something. You have the benefit of church.

You have the benefit of the blessings of God. But even that little bit you had, which wasn't appreciated, will be snatched and taken away. It will be a place of loss.

But also, worse than that, there will be a place of fear and despair. Jesus is very plain, isn't he? In all of these parables, it's the same descriptions. Verse 30.

Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. And in that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of people. Darkness is a place where you're terrified.

[16 : 27] When you can't see. I have a mate who went to, it was a game around the world. I think they were in the Sahara Desert, with some friends. And at night, you cannot see pitch black.

You can't see a hand in front of your face. And so his mates did a joke on him, where they, in the middle of the night, they moved the tent. And he woke up.

And for a moment, he was utterly terrified. Because he thought he'd been abandoned in the middle of the desert. I couldn't see a thing. He was terrified. And then he heard the giggles. He said, oh, great joke.

But just for that moment, it was terror. Out of darkness, there is terror. That's not a joke, actually.

And it's a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you ever, can you remember as an adult, weeping? Actually weeping. Hearing an adult weeping is awful.

[17 : 31] But that's the sound you hear. A gnashing of teeth. I don't know what gnashing of teeth is. Is it rabid anger? Is it going mad?

Or is it utter frustration? I was there. He was my Lord. I served him. I thought I was going to be in that place. And I'm here. And it goes on and on and on.

And there's no hope of any difference, of making any change. And it going on for year, after decade, for millennia. And there's no way out.

Jesus is the plainest speaker about hell. It's absolutely terrible. We need to speak and think. You know, who wants to think about hell?

It's the wise person that does, actually. It's not the masochist. It's the person that knows, that I cannot be there. And nor can anyone else I know. He says this now, because it's not too late.

[18 : 34] So, here's the question. Am I making a profit? That's the, that's what I need to, I need to know the answer to, because Jesus is coming back. How do I know if I'm making a profit or not?

Now, the annoying answer to that question that I'm going to give you right now is, I'm going to tell you in the next parable. That's told, to be continued. We'll think more about that, this afternoon.

But let me just finish, I think, just here, by emphasising what I think is the key underlying difference between the servants in this parable.

Just one thought. I think that the thing that drove the wise good servants, and also drove in a different direction, the wicked lazy one, was what they thought of their master.

The key motivation was their Lord. You can just imagine, can't you, the good and faithful ones, they're working really hard in the office, trading, trying to make some money.

[19 : 42] Why? Oh, you want to see the look on the master's face when he comes back and sees what I've done for him. That is their motivation. But likewise, the wicked lazy servant, what's his motivation as he just gets on and serves his life and doesn't, he's saying, I don't want to serve him.

I don't want to be very little thing. Really, the focus deep down underneath for all of them is what they thought of, him. Now, I think, I don't know, I find it, I find this as a gospel minister, it's easy to do ministry, but I'm not doing it for Jesus.

Do you know what I mean? Do you know what I mean? It's easy to do Christian stuff because it's either my duty or it's my job or out of guilt or because I'm on the rotor or because that's what I've got.

and Jesus is nowhere in my affections and in my mind. What I've loved working on this week, through prayers, I'm saying to Jesus, you know, I want to do this to please you.

Every tiny little thing, every cup of cold water I give to a Christian, I do it to please him. So let this parable remind us that one day the Lord Jesus will say to those of us who served him with whichever ability we've got, with the different amounts that we're given, with whatever we can, when he says to us, well done, good and faithful servant.

[21 : 19] That's the day we're running for. In a sense, being prepared for Jesus coming back is looking forward to that moment. well done, good and faithful servant.

So there's my little question, I'm going to finish on that. Is that what you're running for? Is that what you're living for? Is that the day that you're, you know, like an athlete, you know, like a marathon runner?

The finishing line, that is it. Well done, good and faithful servant. Because we serve him. Why don't we pray and then we can do some questions. Let's pray. Our Lord Jesus, we are your willing and happy servants.

We love you. We thank you so much for saving us, for bringing us into your kingdom, that we might have the hope of eternal life, this wonderful inheritance.

And that you have made us your people that we might live, not just to go to church and not just to read our Bibles and to do religious things, but to serve our Lord, our wonderful Lord.

[22 : 30] And Lord Jesus, we cannot wait for the day when we see your face, your glory, with our own eyes and to hear those wonderful words from your very lips.

Well done, Mark, good and faithful servant. So until that day, Lord Jesus, everything that we do, everything that we say, we give to you when we want to do it, to please you with all of our hearts, soul, mind and strength, because we love you and we do it for your honour and for your glory.

And we pray all these things knowing that you need to do this in us by your spirit. And we pray this in your name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.