

Waiting faithfully

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[0 : 00] The reading is from Matthew 24. We start reading at verse 44. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, My master is delayed and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him, and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

[1 : 31] As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, Here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

But the wise answered, saying, Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves. And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, Truly I say to you, I do not know you.

Watch therefore, For you know neither the day nor the hour. Well, good morning. Do keep that passage open, and do have the service sheet to hand at the back, to follow as we go through.

[2 : 50] Expect delays. They're the words nobody wants to hear, aren't they? Over the tannoy, at the train station. As you're driving along, you see the motorway sign, queues, expect delays.

And at the airport, delayed, delayed, delayed. I remember being in the airport when I was younger, and my flight was delayed for four hours. What do you do for four hours? There's only so many times you can go and test all the perfumes, and go into the duty free, and people watch.

What do you do in a delay? Well, we're in a section of Matthew's gospel, and when Jesus is talking about when he'll come again, and his overall point throughout these chapters gets repeated.

Have a look down. Chapter 24, verse 42. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. Verse 44. Therefore, you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming, and now you do not expect.

And then 25, 13. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. And last week, we saw that Jesus will return, and he will return in judgment.

[4 : 03] And so we need to be ready. And what these parables, these two parables we have this morning that we're looking at, have in common, is a delay. One of you noticed that as it's read out.

Verse 48. Have a look down. The wicked servant says to himself, My master is delayed. And again, chapter 25, verse 5. The bridegroom was delayed.

And it's the delay, in both these parables, that catches people out. For us this morning, we are living in a delay. At the moment, the delay of Jesus' coming has lasted nearly 2,000 years.

It's a gracious delay, as we've seen last week, and in 2 Peter chapter 3, that God wants everyone to repent and find forgiveness. And that's why he's delaying the coming. And there are encouraging things in these parables.

But there's also warnings. And that's the overall tone, of do not get caught out. Be warned. Because Jesus will return.

[5 : 06] We can be sure it will happen. But we don't know when it will happen. And it will happen suddenly. So then, how does Jesus want us to wait for him?

What does it mean now, to wait for him, in the delay of his coming? Now, it can't be like waiting for a bus, or peering out the window, like a dog, waiting for their owner to come back. What does Jesus mean?

How do we live now? Well, that's what Jesus will flesh out, in the next few parables, in Matthew 24 and 25, both this week and next. So the first parable then, and the point there on your handout, wait for the master, with faithful service.

Wait for the master, with faithful service. Look down at verse 45. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master set over his household, to give them their food, at the proper time.

There's a servant, and there's a master. The master is going away. He's maybe called away on business. And he's placed this servant, in charge of the household. And his task, give them their food, at the proper time.

[6 : 17] You're in charge of the menu. You're the chef. And the faithful and wise servant, carries out the duties. Takes the master's instructions, carefully. Seriously.

Maybe he's drawn up a menu, at the start of the week. He's been online, and done the food shop. Checked the receipts, to make sure there's no mistakes. And he's logged them away, for the expenses. He's taking his service seriously.

And the master comes back, verse 46, sees the servant, doing the task he's been given, and he is rewarded. He's made sure, that the food is ready, at the right time.

And he's rewarded, verse 47. Well, what a reward. It's a promotion, isn't it? Have a look down. He will set him over, all his possessions. He's no longer just in charge, of the kitchen, but the whole estate.

A great reward. But then Jesus supposes, that this servant is wicked. And that this, when the servant sees, the master is delayed, verse 48.

[7 : 18] Well, he ignores the instructions, does the complete opposite. Instead of looking, after the servants, he beats them. Instead of preparing the food, he's eating the food, with drunkards, and other people.

And it's striking here, that the delay, in this parable, does not lead, to a half-baked job. It's not leading, to a slackening off. It's not like, he just got, half the meals ready.

But a complete disregard. The servant here, is either on task, or he's wicked. On task, or ungodly. And that's, it's quite striking, isn't it?

He professes to be a servant, but in a delay, he makes that grab for power. Today I'll be the boss. Maybe tomorrow, or next week. Then I'll be the servant. I remember when I was younger, my parents went away, for the weekend.

I was placed in charge, of the house, and my younger brother. Somehow I'd lulled them, into thinking, that I was a responsible, young adult. I can't remember, how old I was.

[8 : 20] Maybe I was sixth form, or maybe it was, just at university. And don't worry, I had my auntie and grandparents, around the corner. So they were fine. But as soon as the parents, are out of the driveway, what's going through my head?

Great. I am in charge. Tim, my younger brother, make me a tea. And I ordered him around. I did look after him, a little bit, I'm sure. I'm in charge now.

I can live how I want. And basically, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, how I'll treat my brother. It doesn't matter, how I'll treat the house. I don't want to lie to you, there may or may not, have been a party.

They may have. There may have been, no, maybe a social gathering, with 20 of my closest friends. And the dangerous thoughts, crept into my head. It doesn't matter, how I live now.

It doesn't matter. Because, at least I'll have time, to put the house back in order. At least I'll have time, to bribe my little brother, to keep quiet. It doesn't matter, how I live now. I saw my parents, as absence, as a chance to live, how I liked.

[9 : 27] Mistreating my brother, and the house. And the wicked servant, in our parable, does similar. He sees the delay, in the master's coming, as a chance, for a power grab. Rather than, sacrificial service, it was wicked, behavior.

But then, the refrain, that comes through, the master does return, at a time, he does not, expect. And at how, he does not know, and there is punishment.

And look down, verse 51, severe punishment. He will cut him in pieces, and put him with the hypocrites. In that place, there will be weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

A description, of hell, that Jesus often uses. Weeping, and gnashing of teeth. Utter, torment. A faithful servant, carries out his duties, and is rewarded.

A wicked servant, on the other hand, sees the delay, and reacts, by ignoring, the master. He's not coming back. Or at least he is, he won't be for ages. I've got time.

[10:33] I can live how I want. But that thinking, shows he's not a true servant. Verse 51, he's placed with the hypocrites. He is punished.

And for the disciples, Jesus is speaking to, he's about to leave, and he's about to put them in charge. In Matthew 28, he's about to send them out, into the world, to make disciples.

To give Christ's household, spiritual food. to serve those, in their care. And so for them, the questions Jesus is asking, who is the wise servant? Will you be faithful?

And Jesus, himself, knows what is about to happen. He himself, came to serve. To serve his disciples, and us. To give his life, as a ransom for many, to secure that blessing.

Out of love, he gives up his life, that by trusting in him, we have that inheritance, waiting for us. And so now, what does it look like, to wait? Well, we wait, for the master, with faithful service.

[11:41] What gifts, and responsibilities, has Jesus, given you, to serve? Because we all have a part, to play, in serving Christ's household. This is what it looks like, to be a faithful servant.

In Grace Church, here this morning, we've got, lots of people, amazing people, who sacrificially serve. We are blessed, to be in such a position, where we have so many people, giving up their time, and their money, to serve.

And it's costly. And it does involve, hard work. And we're up front, about that. It means, giving up those weekends away, to come back, and teach children, and Sunday club. Giving up your Tuesday evenings, to lead growth group, or to attend, to serve other people.

Giving up your time, to practice songs, ready for Sunday morning. And other ways, that we serve.

Yes, we all have busy lives, but friends, remember the task, that Jesus has given, his people.

We are called, to faithfully serve him, by serving his people. And so that affects, the decisions we make. The things we spend, our time doing. When we take, on too much, and we think, well I can't serve, because I'm doing, too much elsewhere.

[12:59] When things quieten down, then I will serve. But here's the encouragement, to keep going. Here's the encouragement, in this passage. Verse 46, and 47.

Blessed is that servant, whom his master, will find so doing, when he comes. Truly I say to you, he'll be set over, his possessions. The faithful servant, is blessed, blessed, and has God's, eternal favour.

How often do you think, about heaven? About eternity? About receiving, that reward, from Jesus, for faithfully carrying out, the responsibilities, you've been given.

That should indeed, spare us on, shouldn't it? That reward, waiting for us. In the home, husbands and wives, you've been given, the responsibility, to serve, your spouse, as you wait, for your master, not to love power.

Parents, you've been given, responsibility, to care for your children, to shepherd them, and feed them spiritually. And the encouragement, again, verse 46, and 47.

[14:08] Faithfully serving Jesus, leads to eternal blessing. To share, in the inheritance, secured for us, through his death. How amazing is it, that Jesus, done all the work, done all the work, for us to be, secure, in our inheritance.

Yet when we get there, we are rewarded. Another application, those are the encouragements, to serve. Another application, for us, keeping our eyes, fixed on the return, the master, will guard against, ungodly behaviour.

The wicked servant, acts as a warning to us, of how not to act, in the delay. I wonder if you, remember being at school, when the teacher, leaves the classroom, it's always an unnerving, kind of time, isn't it?

They leave, they set your task, and they go out. I remember that at school, and two minutes pass, and you're still writing. Maybe five minutes pass, he's still not back. Maybe rubbers, little rubbers get thrown around, trying to hit people.

Little whispers, little speaking. And then ten minutes gone, anarchy. It's chaos. And the teacher comes back. What happens? Well, just as remembering, that a teacher, when he's out of the room, can return at any time, that spurs you on, for good behaviour.

[15:24] Well, remembering Jesus, can return at any time, keeps us from unfaithfulness, and wicked behaviour. How dreadful would it be, if Jesus returned, at the moment, that we were behaving, wickedly?

Because, verse 44, there will be an audit. There will be a holding to account. And the warning is in verse 51.

People who profess to be servants, but are self-serving, and wicked, will show themselves to be hypocrites. Not true disciples. So what does it look like, to wait for Jesus?

We're waiting for the master, with faithful service. And then Jesus tells another parable, to give us another angle, about the delay in his return, and what it means to be ready, and awake.

The parable of the ten virgins, as it's known. And with the wicked servant, the delay, led to bad behaviour. But in this second parable, the delay, led to unpreparedness.

[16:30] And so our second point this morning, wait for the bridegroom, with perseverance. Wait for the bridegroom, with perseverance. Look down at verse 1. Then the kingdom of heaven, will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went to meet, the bridegroom.

In the culture, at the time, Jesus is speaking about, weddings went a bit differently. The groom and his friends, would leave his home, and they'd go to the home of the bride.

There they would get married, and then they would come back, to the groom's house, for the celebration feast. The bride is not the centre of attention, it's all about the bridegroom, here. And verse 2, we're told that these virgins, probably bridesmaids, is the equivalent of, well five were foolish, because they had no oil with them, in their lamps.

And but five were wise, because they did. Not told why, there was a delay, but we knew, verse 5, the bridegroom is delayed, and so they fell asleep.

And you can't blame them, isn't it? I mean, it's a tiring day, weddings, isn't it? You've got all the makeup to do, helping the bride with their dress, all the fake smiles, and photographs, which I'm looking forward to.

[17:45] And you just, and you just get tired. It's a tiring day, and so they sleep, and they're slept, and they're sleeping. But then, midnight comes to cry, verse 6, the bridegroom is coming, they awoke, they awoke, oh no, not ready, oh no, he's coming, he's coming, he's around the corner, quick, quick, give us some oil, give us some oil, quick, he's coming.

No, there's not going to be enough for both of us, get your own oil. Oh, oh rubbish, rubbish, run away, run away, get the oil, get the oil, come back. Too late, too late.

They awoke, they're frantically looking for oil, probably no 24 hour supermarkets in those days, maybe knocking on doors, trying to scrounge from somewhere. Where? Verse 10, those who were prepared went in.

The late comers were shut out and disowned. Verse 12, I do not know ye. And then comes Jesus' application, watch therefore, for you neither know the day nor the hour.

The meaning then, it is not enough to have been ready once, but to persevere in readiness to the end, to keep watch, to keep persevering, to keep prepared.

[19:06] You see, the first parable instruction, the thief last week, be ready at any time. Don't be surprised. The third parable here, the virgins, persevere because it could be a long time.

With the wicked servant, delay bred bad behavior. Here, delay means unpreparedness. They weren't prepared for the long delay. And so they were caught short when he came.

And they truly were not known by the bridegroom. By telling both parables here, Jesus warns of his disciples and us about both reactions to this delay in his coming.

Wicked behavior and lack of perseverance. Lack of preparedness when he does come. And so what are the implications for us? Well, again, there's warnings and encouragements here in this second parable.

Firstly, the warnings. Just as it is a mistake not to be ready at any time, it is, is it as a mistake not to be ready for a long time? You see, we often think our decisions we make now in our lives are short term.

[20:18] They're individual. And they don't have much knock-on effect. Well, Jesus might come back this year, but are we at least ready to stay prepared for the next five, 10, 15 years?

The decisions we make in the present do affect our perseverance. The things that we spend our time doing that take away from serving, that take away from our time that we can spend in God's word.

Things that take away our love for Jesus. Living for the now and not being prepared for eternity. Because readiness is measured on our readiness when the bridegroom comes.

You see, that's another warning. You see, all the virgins, all the bridesmaids were ready at one point. They all look the same. They're all ready. But only five were prepared for when he actually came.

They were prepared for the delay. They persevered. We all probably know people who once professed faith in Jesus. About 10 years ago, maybe 20 years ago.

[21 : 20] But if Jesus came today, they would not be ready. However long the wait is, persevere. And another warning. Everyone is individually responsible for their readiness and perseverance.

Look again at verse 8 and verse 9. The foolish said to the wise, give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, since are we not enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.

Each of the 10 were individually responsible. Just as the oil is not transferable, nor is readiness.

And so each of us in this room, here this morning, are called to be individually ready for Jesus.

It's not enough to be married to someone who's trusting in Jesus. Not enough that your parents are trusting in Jesus. We are all called to account before him.

And it's a dreadful thing not to be prepared, isn't it? I wonder if that kind of, one of the things you dread is not being prepared for things. Maybe it keeps you up at night. An exam, not being prepared for an exam, not being prepared for a meeting or a presentation, or not being prepared for, if you get a flat tire, no spare.

[22 : 41] It's dreadful not to be prepared. But it is infinitely more dreadful to face Jesus unprepared. And so if you're here today and you're not trusting in Jesus, you wouldn't call yourself prepared, well then do not rest until you are.

Do not rest until your soul is secured. And that security comes when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus. He invites you to come to him before the door is shut, before he says, I do not know ye.

And cling to him. Notice too the finality of the judgment in verse 10. The door was shut. Latecomers were not allowed in.

Last month David Spargo managed to blag his way backstage at his favorite band gig after telling a security guard he was related to one of the people in the band.

On the door, how did he prove it? Well he got his phone, he turned to Wikipedia and he showed his name there in the article. This is the band, this is me, I'm related. He failed to mention to the security guard that he himself edited that Wikipedia page seconds before and he blagged his way in and the band thought it was so hilarious that they invited him to stay and had a beer.

[23 : 59] That's often how we think will happen at the end, isn't it? Even if I'm not prepared, I'll blag it. I'll wing my way in. Maybe that's, maybe that's just the culture of business in London.

I'll just blag it. It'll be fine. But there's no way blagging your way into this marriage feast. There's no wedding crashes here. A stark message for all of us.

A stark message for those of us who are not trusting in Jesus. How awful would it be to be told, I do not know you. Awful. But as we close the encouragement in verse 10, have a look down.

The bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast. Jesus often depicted as a bridegroom and heaven described as a joy, a time of joy and celebration.

A massive marriage feast, a banquet, to end all banquets. A time when Jesus' bride will be united to Jesus and they'll praise him forevermore. The lamb who was slain, the bridegroom who laid down his life for her.

[25 : 11] That's something to look forward to, to anticipate, to long for. Now, engagement is a funny time. It's like you're there and you're not there. The longer it goes on, the more chance for love to go up and down.

And it's the same for Jesus. The longer the period until the wedding, there's more chance for our love to grow cold, to grow up and down. So how are you making sure you are looking forward to that day with anticipation?

Making sure that you still look forward to that day in five, ten, fifteen years' time if we're still waiting by then. Trust in Jesus and you will be there for eternity, known by him and as his bride.

So persevere. We don't know how long the delay will last. It won't last forever but our souls will. And so, how does Jesus want us to wait for him now?

Well, we wait for the master with faithful service, longing for that eternal blessing that is ready for us. And we wait for the bridegroom and perseverance always anticipating being at that great marriage feast.

[26 : 28] Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for the warnings you have given us here in your word about your second coming.

Father, please help us to watch, to keep watch, to stay prepared for you. Father, please help us to long for that day where we will be with you for eternity.

Amen.