

Good and faithful servant?

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Date: 08 December 2024

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[0 : 00] Matthew 25 verse 13, 13.

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Thank you so much for reading, Sophie. As I said, we're in the season of Advent and Advent is a time for waiting.

[2 : 13] We thought about that last week in our sermon and if you were there last week, you might be confused why we're going backwards in the passage this week. That's because we weren't planning to do this sermon originally, but that's okay.

We're doing it now. And Jesus in all of chapters Matthew chapter 24 and 25 speaks about his return to his disciples.

He wants them to wait for him and look forward to him coming back and be ready. The thing that we're going to learn this morning is that when Jesus calls us to wait for him to return, he doesn't ask us to wait passively, but actively anticipate.

I want you to imagine this. Christmas Day is coming up.

It is. And you are hosting some distant relatives. You're really looking forward to them coming. It's a big occasion. You're excited and perhaps a bit nervous for all these distant relatives coming to your house.

[3 : 21] And so what do you do? You write it in your diary. You set a countdown timer on your phone, perhaps. You maybe sit on the sofa watching the clock until eventually Christmas Day will come and your distant relatives will come and visit.

You're eager. You're waiting. Sat there watching the clock day after day. And then Christmas Day arrives and you get a knock on the door. You open it and your distant relatives are there.

And they're all in their festive dress and they're carrying gifts. And suddenly you realise the house is cold. The decorations are still packed away.

I didn't even buy a turkey. You were waiting. You were even excited. But you weren't ready. Jesus teaches us that as we wait for his return, as we look forward to his return, we shouldn't just wait passively.

Instead, we should live with active anticipation. Waiting well means getting prepared, living with purpose, making good use of our time now.

[4 : 30] The return of Jesus is central to the Christian faith. It is the future event that shapes everything now. One day he will return to judge the world and set things right.

But Jesus doesn't just want us to watch the clock. He wants us to get ready for his return. Hopefully this Advent, you have been reminded of the importance of Jesus' return.

Today, we'll see how that future event should shape our lives now. Let's dive into the parable.

Jesus tells a parable, a simple story with a deep meaning.

He's been speaking about his return and the coming kingdom of heaven. That's what this parable is all about. When Jesus says, it will be like, he's talking about his return and the coming kingdom of heaven.

Look at verse 14. Jesus says, again, The man going away on a journey represents Jesus.

[5 : 44] He will go away and then return. In the meantime, he entrusts his wealth to his servants. He wants them to take responsibility of it. If the servants love their master, they'll take care of the things that he's given them to honour him.

The parable is telling a story a bit like this. Imagine your boss is going away on a trip. And the company that you work for is doing relatively well.

And so your boss gives you some of the profits to look after while they're away and says, put them to good use. And when I come back from my trip, I'll review how you put the money to good use. And your boss entrusts it to you, wants you to invest it wisely to make good use of the money. The master in the parable does the exact same thing. He goes away and entrusts his wealth to his servants while he's away.

The master gives bags of gold. The Greek word, which Matthew's gospel was first written in, was talanta, which means a big, heavy amount of money.

[6 : 57] So bags of gold is a good translation. You might guess or notice, though, that talanta is where we get the English word talents from.

And this is a parable that is not only talking about money, nor is it only talking about our talents, like we might define them in English. It's not just talking about talented people either.

Jesus uses these talents or these bags of gold to illustrate anything we have received from God.

J.C. Ryle, the old evangelical bishop of Liverpool, says of this passage, Anything by which we may glorify God is a talent.

Do you notice in the parable?

In the parable, Jesus says that the exact quantity entrusted to each servant varies. That might make us concerned. Why does the master do that? Is that fair?

[8 : 14] All of God's gifts are given generously. We might have different amounts or different gifts. But as we'll see in the parable, the point is not so much about what you have or how much you have, but about what you do with it.

As the gifts are distributed, straightaway two servants get to work. Verse 16. The man who had received five bags of gold, or five talents, went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.

So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. They don't hesitate. They see the responsibility given to them and they work hard, honouring their master by investing well.

But the third servant does something strange. Verse 18. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Imagine, as I said earlier, your boss is entrusted to you some of the company's profits to invest well before they come back from their trip.

[9 : 23] But instead of investing it wisely, you simply put the money in your kitchen cupboards to keep it safe until they return. Or, as Jesus says in the parable, it's like you dug a hole in the ground and buried the money there to hide it.

It's not a good use of the money. It's not a good use of the company's profits. It's a waste of the opportunity and does not honour your boss who has asked you to use the money well.

It's strange what this third servant does. Rather than eagerly anticipating his master's return by making use of the money and gets ready, he just waits passively, kind of twiddling his thumbs.

But the emphasis on the parable, what Jesus devotes most of the teaching to, is when the master returns. What will he make of the various servants?

First, we have two good servants. Verse 20, the first servant comes to the master. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five.

[10 : 30] Master, he said, you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I've gained five more. And the master is delighted. This is exactly the kind of thing he was hoping for.

The master replies, well done, good and faithful servant. Wouldn't it be amazing to hear words like that from God? After the hard, faithful work this servant has put in.

After all the time of waiting for his master. After the risks and setbacks that perhaps inevitably go from making an investment. To finally hear, well done.

You have been good and faithful servant. More than that, he doesn't just get a compliment, but an invitation. The master says, verse 21, You have been faithful with a few things.

I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. The faithful servant is invited into God's eternal kingdom.

[11 : 37] To have responsibility. To share in God's happiness. I find this so encouraging. I hope you do too.

I hope you know God has called us to work in his kingdom. And if we do so faithfully, at the end we'll hear this. Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. I said before that Jesus' teaching is not so much about what talents we've been given now, but more about what we do with it.

We can see that because the master's interaction as he settles the account with the second servant, who was given two bags, is exactly the same as with the servant who was given five bags. Both of them were faithful, even though they had different amounts originally. So the result is exactly the same. They're approved and honoured by the master whom they honoured.

[12 : 45] The parable is really encouraging. It's good to use all that you have for God's kingdom. And if you do, you'll get to share in it forever. And share in God's happiness forever.

But then we have the third servant. He has a strange reply. He shows up in verse 22 and says this. Master, you entrusted me with two... No, sorry, not verse 22. Verse 24. Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid, and went out, and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you. It's a strange reply.

Why does he say this? Is it true? Or is he just trying to shift the blame? It's probably the most puzzling bit of the whole parable.

[13 : 48] It seems to me like he might just be making excuses. The master might be a hard worker, and a serious businessman. But that's just an excuse.

The servant was never going to work hard. He's lazy, and so he's trying to justify his action. Or perhaps, he gives this excuse, because he's afraid.

Perhaps he thinks that what he's been given isn't enough. Perhaps he compares himself to the servant who has five bags of gold, and thinks, what good can I do with just one bag? Maybe he's afraid that he'll waste, or ruin what he's been given, or that it will all be embarrassing.

Well, either out of fear, or just plain laziness, the servant completely wastes what he's been given. He doesn't even do the bare minimum of putting the money in the bank to get interest.

He does nothing. He just buries the money in the ground, and waits. Here's something I find convicting about this parable. If you looked at the third servant, you might say, well, he's just as ready as the other two.

[15 : 03] He's been waiting for the day of his master's return, presumably too. In fact, you might even argue that he's maybe more prepared. He's not got the money tied up in investments.

He's just had it buried in the ground, kind of ready to go at a moment's notice. He maybe is waiting for his master. But being genuinely ready for Jesus' return doesn't just mean waiting around. It doesn't mean passively waiting. Instead, it means being active, actively anticipating Jesus' return. It means being passionate about his kingdom, giving ourselves to him, getting ready for the future. It's about using what God has given us and getting actively ready for Jesus' return. One day, Jesus will return. It'll be the most climactic and decisive moment of all history.

Don't let it creep up on you like your relatives coming around for Christmas when you didn't even bother to buy a turkey. Jesus' future return must shape our lives now as we get ready and use what God has given us for his kingdom.

[16 : 18] There's two sides to this parable. Do you see them? If you use what God has given you for his kingdom, he'll say, well done, good and faithful servant. And yet, if you waste what God has given you, there is a strong warning.

From verse 26, his master replied, you wicked, lazy servant. So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed.

Well, then you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest. So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has 10 bags.

For whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's a strong warning. God doesn't permit you to have a meaningless, wasted life.

[17 : 24] God cares about how you live your life. He has given you the things that you have so that you would use them for his kingdom. Ultimately, for the third servant, his failure and lack of faithfulness leaves him outside of God's eternal kingdom.

He is not welcome to share his master's joy. Instead, he faces torment. He misses out so much compared to the other two. And so, perhaps the question is this.

What does it mean for us? Well, there's a serious encouragement and a serious warning, but it means this. Therefore, use your talents. Use your talents for God's kingdom.

As we live lives looking forward to Jesus' return, we're called to use all that we have for God's kingdom. And in doing so, we're invited to share in it forever.

God has given so much to you. I don't know if you realise that. Everything that you have, your money, your time, your skills, your responsibilities, your relationships, everything you have is a gift from God.

[18 : 44] We are his servants and everything we have is a gift or really a loan from God. We are to work for his service using what he has lent to us.

So, don't waste it. Don't waste your life. Now, it's kind of obvious some of the ways we can waste our life, right? You can do that by endlessly scrolling on Instagram reels or endlessly reading football transfer rumours or endlessly trying to get to the next level in your game or endlessly dreaming about the holidays that you want to have next year.

Yet, at one level, we kind of know those things are a waste. And so it's possible, I think, even more dangerously to waste our lives on things that we actually think matter and yet don't matter so much. Spending your whole life in the pursuit of trying to be liked by everyone that you meet or spending your whole life just trying to provide the most comfortable lives for your family.

Spending your whole life pursuing the next career jump or to finally be good looking enough or to finally get the attention of that other person or to finally build the house extension you were always dreaming of.

[20 : 05] Those things are arguably more dangerous than watching endless Instagram reels on our phone because we think they're really meaningful. We don't even realise that they're a waste of our lives.

And yet none of those things will last forever nor are they ultimate. They're fun for a while even maybe have some real good in them.

They might make you feel good. They might make you look good. But God invites us more than that. He commands us to make our lives really count.

Jesus tells us in this parable that while we wait for his return we should live passionately and purposefully using all that God has given us for his kingdom. Otherwise, it's a little bit like being an absolutely massive bodybuilder.

But rather than using your strength you just lie in bed playing video games for weeks. You let all your muscles waste away and atrophy it's such a waste.

[21 : 12] Instead, God says use what you have for his glory and his kingdom. Don't be the bodybuilder who just lies in bed playing video games day after day.

I want to finish by speaking about a few particular practical areas that we might think about. How can we use what God has given us for his kingdom?

Firstly, money. Everything that we have is a gift from God including every penny and pound that we have. So use whatever you have in a way that glorifies God.

One day when Jesus returns he will ask how you used all that he gave to you. And so rather than just spending it on yourself be committed to God's kingdom.

Whether you are working full time and have the biggest salary you have ever had in your life or whether you are currently living off parents' pocket money or somewhere in between God has given you what you have.

[22 : 14] So use it to glorify him. Secondly, time. We never feel like we have enough of it but each day that we do have is entrusted to us by God.

Therefore, use your time for Jesus' glory and give your time to really good things that prepare you for Jesus' return like studying the Bible and serving at church and showing up to small group even when you don't really want to or praying for others.

Each day that you have is given to you by God so don't waste it. Our skills. Each of us has unique skills that God has given to us and he wants us to use them for his kingdom.

Where there are opportunities to do so make the most of the skills that God has given you. Maybe you are skilled in cooking or organising or public speaking or hugging or with numbers.

The skills that you have are gifts from God that he wants you to use for his kingdom. Fourth, responsibility. Any responsibilities we have whether at work in local community or even with family are responsibilities that God in his sovereignty has entrusted to you.

[23 : 37] Use the responsibilities that you have to reflect Jesus to encourage others to speak truth to bring good in the world. When Jesus returns he will ask you how did you use the responsibilities that I gave to you?

And the question is what do you want to be able to reply to Jesus? Lastly, relationships or the people that you meet. All the relationships that you have with other people are given to you by God and so don't waste them.

It's not a coincidence that the people around you are in your life. And so we mustn't passively wait for Jesus' return but actively anticipate it.

So that means telling people about Jesus helping get them ready or helping them get ready. It would be a great tragedy to know someone for years or for God to give you a connection with someone and to never tell them about Jesus.

God has given you that relationship. Perhaps the person who lives in the flat next to you or the person who sits opposite you at work. God has given you that relationship. With all of these things we have a joy and a responsibility to use the gifts that God has given us for his glory.

[25 : 02] These things are a gift from him. Whether it is money, time, skills, responsibility, relationships. They're for his kingdom. I hope you see this is deeply purposeful, eternally significant and actually very joyful to live with the hope and expectation that one day Jesus will say to you well done good and faithful servant.

the key question in today's passage is how do we wait well for Jesus' return? The answer is don't wait passively rather actively anticipate that Jesus is coming back.

Use all that you have all that God has given you for his kingdom. We live with a deadline Jesus' return so work towards that. I want you to think practically about the things that God has given you and take this seriously.

I need to do that to not be like the bodybuilder I don't know if I am a bodybuilder but to not be like the bodybuilder who just lets their muscles atrophy from playing video games all day.

Not just putting the cash in the kitchen cupboard but rather investing it well for God's kingdom. God doesn't want you to waste your life. God has placed you where you are and given you all that you have for his glory and kingdom so don't waste it.

[26 : 36] The Christian life is one that is forward focused in some ways. We live looking forward to Jesus' return to the fact that one day your master will ask you what did you do with those things that I gave you?

What do you want to be able to say to that? That you wasted it or that you used it well for him so that we might hear the words well done good and faithful servant.

Let's pray. our Father thank you that we're not in the darkness about Jesus' return but that through your word through his teaching that he has made it clear to us.

Thank you that Jesus is kind and that all who trust in him will be welcomed to him on that final day. but Father please help us to not waste our lives now.

Father please make us servants who are faithful to you who see what you have given us and use it for your glory that we might be ready for Jesus' return. Father please help us with that this advent and always.

[27 : 56] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing our final song together and again kind of a prayer that the Lord would be our vision guiding us through life and that things might not be we wouldn't waste our lives but that we would really live them for him.

Do you want to stand as the music starts? Amen.