

Waiting for the Kingdom

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Date: 24 May 2009

Preacher: Rev. Steve James

[0 : 0 0] We are so glad to be with you today at the beginning of these three weeks that you have. Difficult weeks, but we sense that people are gathering.

It's a little bit like the Fellowship of the Ring, that wonderful Tolkien book. We've all gathered to give you great support. And I'm going to begin by reading a letter that has been sent to us from Anglican mainstream in the UK.

And they want me to read this out as a letter of support. To Canon David Short, Reverend Dr. Jim Packer, the Wardens and the Church Council of St. John's Church, Shaughnessy and the Congregation.

And other churches in the Anglican Network in Canada in Vancouver. Dear friends in Christ, we greet you warmly as members of the Church of Christ and the Church of England.

Our Anglican mainstream steering committee, which includes church leaders from all parts of the British Isles. As well as a number of members of the Church of England's General Synod. Met together on the 21st of May.

[1 : 0 5] And resolved unanimously to assure you that we stand together in fellowship with you as brothers and sisters in the Christian faith. And we recognize in you the marks of authentic Anglican identity, faith and practice.

We therefore send you this message of solidarity, encouragement and support in prayer as you enter a judicial process on Monday the 25th of May.

To enable you to continue to use the property and resources that God has entrusted to you. In the service of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for the good of all the people in Vancouver.

Yours in Christ, Dr. Philip Giddings, convener of Anglican Mainstream, canon Chris Sugden and Bishop Wallace Ben, trustee who I'm sure you know. Wonderful to be able to read that out to you.

And also to add my own greetings as well. I asked Bishop Wallace, I was with him on Monday. And he said, pass this on.

[2 : 1 1] And I'm just going to echo it in my own words. Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. For you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Corinthians 15. And that is our passage this morning. Luke 19, verse 11, page 78. It's all about our labor and our work.

In the period between Jesus' first coming and his return. As we wait for the return of the king. If I can keep the Tolkien theme going a little bit longer.

And you do wonder actually, don't you? When you're in between. In that period of in between. You've had the Lord's first coming and his commission.

And you wait for him to come. Strange things go through your mind. I get instructions from Rachel to go shopping.

- [3 : 14] And she sends me to Tesco's to get various. Do you have Tesco's over here? I don't know if you do. But be warned if you do. But anyway, they'll take over. To get such and such.
- And halfway around Tesco's. I begin to wonder. Did she say get the cuss-cuss? And the marmalade? And what is cuss-cuss? And what does it look like anyway?
- And should I be in Tesco's at all? You can see that I'm getting older. And my memory is clearly fading. And then I suddenly remember. I remember she has given me written instructions.
- She's given me a list. And so I read the list. I read the written instructions. And I know what I'm meant to be doing. We're going to the written instructions now. Luke 19. What are we meant to be doing? The Lord has given us his word.
- And in this parable, three things I want to talk about. Three things that come up. The work of the Lord. The weight that reveals. The work of the Lord.
- [4 : 19] The servants in this story are told that as the master is going away, they are given a pound each. And they're told to do the master's business, to trade with us until I come.
- To get about the work of the Lord. Now what is the work of the Lord? Well, you've just seen it. Last week in the story just before this.
- As they heard these things, what did they hear? Verse 11. They saw Zacchaeus being transformed by the grace of the Lord. And that is what church is all about.
- It's all about transforming grace. I have a favorite story which makes me laugh. And I tried this on the first congregation rather nervously because my sense of humor is a little bit English.
- And... But they seem to encourage me to carry on. So I'll tell you this story. And I could get into trouble. But there's a story of a redneck farmer who has never ever been to the city at all in his life.
- [5 : 34] He doesn't have a television. He has no contact with the outside world. But he and his family are meant to meet somebody in the city, in the foyer of a hotel.
- And so they go up and they travel up there. And the father and the children are in the foyer of the hotel while his wife is with the bags just sorting one or two things out.
- And as he's in the foyer, he sees this elderly lady walking slowly towards these doors. And these doors open slowly. And the elderly lady goes in through these doors.
- And the doors close. And there are numbers above the door. And they all light up. One, two, three, four, five, six.
- And then it kind of comes down. Six, five, four, three, two, one. And the doors open. And out comes this beautiful young girl.
- [6 : 36] So he's looking at this. And he says to his children, he said, kids, he said, did you see that? And they said, yes. And then he said to the kids, quick, go and get your mother.
- He had confused transportation with transformation. And sometimes, you see, we come to church and we think that we're meant to be transported.
- And in a sense we are in some sense of the beautiful music. But it's more than that, isn't it? It's about transformation. The gospel brings change in people's lives.
- And that's exactly what happened with Zacchaeus. You see this incredible change. A man who loved wealth, now, whose idol was wealth, now gives back four times the amount.
- As a joyful demonstration that he is free of the love of money. How on earth could he do that? Even our British politicians didn't give back their expenses four times.
- [7 : 44] You see, it's because he loved something. He loved something more than money. He loved someone more than money. And Jesus says, that's why I came.

I have given this man a new affection that is greater than everything else. The expulsive power of a new affection. Thomas Chalmers wrote, I think in the 19th century, a great preacher.

And Jesus says, salvation has come to this house. This is the evidence of it. This is a life that is changed from the inside out. I was fortunate enough to visit with one of our suffragan bishops in Manchester, a prison.

He was going to do a confirmation service and he needed some help with music. So I came and played and sang. And at the very beginning of the service, the deputy governor stood up and he said, I like religion in prisons.

He said, it gives and provides a moral compass. And I thought to myself, it's a very famous phrase in the UK. It's actually used by a prime minister.

[8 : 52] And I thought, that is not enough. That is not going to change these prisoners. They need more than just simply knowing what is right. They need something to change them from the inside out.

And that's what the gospel does. The gospel crushes you with your sinfulness. You are laid low to the dust.

You have nothing to be proud about. But then it lifts you up with your immense value because the Son of God died for you. And that is what transforming grace is about.

Where your idols are displaced. Whether it is sex or whether it is affirmation or whether it is wealth. Or whether it is a self-righteousness that you hold on to.

Or a self-condemnation that brings you down. Whatever drives you, drives you no longer. You see, we think of grace, amazing grace, as only there to forgive my sin.

[9 : 59] And that is true. It was Newton's anniversary last year, an amazing grace. And it does remind us that we are forgiven.

But if you read Titus, chapter 2, verse 11, let me read it to you. The grace of God, it says, that brings salvation has appeared to all people and it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

You see, His grace is not just there to forgive me from sin, but to keep me from sinning. That's not me anymore.

I've been bought with a price. I can say no to that. It's a story of a young woman who was, as it were, driven by a need to have relationships.

And she was able to say, after the grace of God had transformed her, I like you, about this guy, but you are not my life. Christ is my life.

[11 : 07] So that is the work of Jesus. And the pound or the minor that they are given is a life touched by grace to be shared, to be preached, to be given, to be lived out in a needy world that needs to know it.

That's the work of Jesus. And that is what you have been doing and what Vancouver needs. Secondly, the weight that reveals. The reason He told this parable is to tell them that there would be a weight for the kingdom to fully come.

And that weight reveals where everybody's heart is. The context is a well-known historical pattern. Jesus says, a nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom and then return.

And that's exactly what Herod and his sons did to receive their kingdoms in Rome. So they went away and at least one son went away to receive his kingdom and the people of the time refused to have him rule over them.

And so Lord Jesus picks that up in verse 14. He says, but the citizens hated him and sent an embassy after him saying, we do not want this man to reign over us. So that's the context.

[12 : 31] It's one of difficulty of people not wanting the king while he's away. And He instructs them as you see in verse 13.

He says, put the money to work. Trade with this till I come. Actually, it's not literally until I come. It's more trade with this because I am coming.

I am coming back. Now put all this together. And actually, if you look further on, actually, it's quite clear that when He returns to the one who has 10 pounds, He says, it's not trade until I come work frenetically, it's work faithfully.

This is what He says. Well done, good servant. Because you have been successful? No. Because you've been faithful. This is what He wants. In that difficult context, you have been faithful.

Now if you put all this together, you see that the context for doing the work of Jesus is difficult in the midst of opposition. But we are meant to be doing it and doing it joyfully.

[13 : 46] Imagine this. Imagine you were living in Iraq. the British Army is moving out as they did. But you're given money by the British Army.

And they say to you, would you please run the British Army Supporters Club while we are away? And the memorabilia store. We will be back, but would you mind doing that?

Do you see the challenge? Kenneth Bailey, who has written a wonderful commentary on these verses, says this.

He says, Jesus is saying, once I return, having received my kingly power, it will be easy for you to declare yourself publicly to be my loyal servants.

I am more interested in how you conduct yourselves when I am absent and have to pay a high price to openly identify yourself with me.

[14 : 54] And I would add with me and my gospel of transforming grace. Is this not very relevant to your situation?

You may have to pay a high price. You're not going to lose everything though because nobody can take away the church because you are the church.

but we stand faithful, don't we? Now, are we going to do the work or are we going to do what the third servant did, which is to say, Lord, here's your pound, I buried it.

That is, of course, the safest thing to do, the sensible thing to do, just to get out of the difficult situation and just put it underground.

But, of course, you see, that third servant was not taken up with the master and his work. So, the weight reveals.

[16 : 02] It just necessarily does. It's a difficult situation. You can feel the tension now, can't you? Of course, when the Lord comes back, you see in the very last verse, those enemies are just simply wiped away.

They weren't a big deal. But at the time, you feel the tension. Now, the great sense in your heart and mine is, Lord, let me be faithful.

What is the secret to being faithful and what is the danger of being unfaithful? Let's look a little bit more at the servants.

The way of the Lord is the third point. Here are two different ways revealed. The first is in the two servants, those two good servants.

And I love what they say in verse 16. Lord, your pound has made ten pounds more. Or in the NIV, you're mine, you gave me.

[17 : 12] You see, they saw what they were given, their gifts, well, life itself actually, as a tremendous gift. And so they were grateful because the Lord is a generous giver.

And in response to that generosity, they simply get to work because he is a generous master. But the third servant didn't see it that way at all.

Look what it says. Verse 20, Lord, here's your pound. Verse 21, for I was afraid of you because you are a severe man.

A severe man? How did he get a view like that? How could his view of the master be so twisted? It's almost an insult as he goes on to say, you take up what you did not lay down, you reap what you did not sow.

But I was thinking about this. I said, why on earth did he say that? It kind of came to me on Friday, actually. Do you notice that the way he describes the master is actually a mirror image of himself.

[18 : 34] The servant actually was a hard-hearted servant. The things of the master didn't matter to him. He didn't even bother to put the money on interest so the master might gain something.

He had a hard way about him. And then, watch this as I change the words around. the servant didn't want to sow because he knew he wouldn't reap.

He didn't want to put in because he knew he wasn't going to take out. So he was not prepared to give his life away for the master.

And so what he does is he creates an image of his master that is made in his own image. that's what he does.

His master is just like him. And that is the tragedy that can happen. You see, in the waiting period, as you're waiting for the Lord to come, as I was in Tesco's shopping, if I move away from what is written, I'm going to lose my sense of the master, aren't I?

[19 : 47] And I'm going to make up a master of my own. That's what's going to go wrong. And I will move away from him. And I will forget that he is a gracious master who loves to give.

That is always what happens. That was the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Did God really say? And it was a little twist, you know, to say, you know, he's cruel like this.

If you eat this fruit, she said, you will be like God. God. And if only Eve had actually had that sort of moment to say, but I am like God.

He's made me in his image. Or this gospel wants to remake me to be like God. God. If our hearts are not melted by the Lord, they're not soft to the master, then it is not going to get hold of us.

And it is not going to melt the heart that simply says this is the greatest thing in the world and I must give my life for this because this is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me.

[21 : 04] And it is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. When I became a Christian, when I was 19, it was wonderful because I knew myself to be a sinner. I knew God knew everything about me and yet he loved me.

God loved me, not as I am, but he loved me even as I am. That's the gospel. You know, it's very striking, the very next verse after our passage, he's told this story and then the Lord Jesus went on ahead going up to Jerusalem.

And he went up to Jerusalem not to be crowned king but to be crucified king. And that he did for you and for me. C.S.

Lewis is always a wonderful writer. In my previous congregation, we're in Manchester now, and we have lots and lots of students.

I am the eldest virtually in the congregation, which is interesting. In my previous congregation, we had someone who was a personal friend of C.S.

[22 : 09] Lewis, and she would talk about him. Her husband wrote a biography of C.S. Lewis. And one of Lewis's best works is *The Great Divorce*, where people take a bus trip from hell and they go up to heaven.

And they're looking around heaven and they're trying to be wooed to stay in heaven. But they think of all kinds of reasons to reject the gracious grace of the Master.

And one of the angels is talking to one of the people and is saying, but let the Lord simply come and change you and forgive you. That's what he wants to do.

And this person says, I don't want to be changed and forgiven. I've come up here to demand my rights. I want my rights.

He owes it to me. God owes it to me. And then he says this, and it's a wonderful English phrase, I've never asked for any bleeding charity, to which the angel says, oh, ask for the bleeding charity.

[23 : 21] It's a great line, isn't it? The bleeding charity for you and for me. If that melts your heart, my friends, I mean, I'm adding to this sermon, I hope I'm not going on too long, but I had to sit at somebody's bedside.

She is dying, and two weeks ago, she has not been to church for many years, but she's been surrounded by Christians and they have ministered to her, and I was able to talk to her and explain to her the gospel.

And I said, do you see that actually it's all been paid for? And with tears in her eyes, she said, really? I said, yes, it's paid for, it's been done. Oh, thank you.

She said, that is absolutely wonderful. Just before she died. But you know, there's something else that will help us to say stuff to this gospel, and it is actually getting on and doing the work of the gospel.

Those two who did this work, this trading, in a context of opposition, they discovered, as they traded, that actually people wanted to know this.

[24 : 40] And I want to encourage you with that, because you can get a kind of hunkered down mentality in all of this. And that's why I'm so pleased to go to the New Spade, because the first thing Guy Bellaby is doing is having a mission.

He's been kicked out of his church, let's have a mission. I think that's a great thing to do. I'll come and do one next year for you. Whether you're in this church or not, actually, I'll just say that.

You're going to hold me to that now, but you see, although people are repelled by the gospel in some ways, they're also deeply attracted by the gospel. Why?

Because they're made in the image of God. And this is the truth. And so as they hear this, something resonates in the heart of every man and woman when they hear the gospel, because it is the truth about the true, real God.

And they're made in that God's image. And so you will see if you do this, that people will recognize the rightness of it, and there will be fruit, and that will encourage you.

[25 : 51] And so Jesus takes away the pound from the unfaithful one, and he gives it to the one who has ten. They're shocked by the maths of Jesus, but he says, the faithful ones I will bless beyond measure, and the unfaithful, they will lose everything.

If you lose your life for me and the gospel, you will find it. But if you keep your life, you will lose it. And you will know in the end that you made the wrong decision if you try and hold on to it.

Friends, this is a time for faithfulness. Keep holding out the word of life, even in the midst of difficulty. don't waste your life.

This is a great book to read. It's by John Piper. It's called Don't Waste Your Life. We give it to our students. We have a hundred students who come to Bible study on a Thursday. This is a great joy. And John Piper says, look at this for a wasted life.

He says, a couple took early retirement when he was 59, she was 51. They live in Punta Gorda, Florida. They cruise on their 30-foot trawler. They play softball and they collect shells.

[26 : 58] Picture them before Christ on the great day of judgment. Look, Lord, see my shells. That's not a great answer, is it? There is no greater joy than to serve the Lord faithfully.

And I read this this morning and it moved me. It's from John chapter 12. The Lord Jesus says this, I tell you the truth, he says, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man or woman who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me. And the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem, you see. But where I am, my servant also will be. So he will be with you in this.

And then this, my father will honor the one who serves me. Serve the Lord with joy, then, and in his service you will find perfect freedom.

[28 : 06] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your wonderful transforming grace.

we who were nothing and now have everything, we who were nobodies and now people of the Lord.

We who once were lost are now found. Lord, so melt our heart that it becomes our joy and our principal delight to live for you in this world.

And so to meet you face to face in the world to come, this we pray in the name of the wonderful Lord Jesus. Amen. Shall we continue in prayer?

Amen. Lord, we thank you. We thank you so much for the gift of prayer.

[29 : 13] we thank you especially this morning for places of prayer, places where your name is honored, where your gospel is preached, where your gospel is heard.

With this gift of prayer, in this place, and in your name, Lord, we turn, we turn to prayer.

Lord, in your mercy, we would begin by praying for peace in the world, a world which needs peace so badly.

We pray for peace in the Middle East this morning. We continue to pray for peace in Afghanistan, Afghanistan, and especially for Canadian soldiers who serve in that conflict.

We pray for peace in Iraq. We pray, Lord, this morning for people who are without homes, who are refugees. We pray for prisoners everywhere.

[30 : 35] Lord, we would pray for all who suffer injustice in this troubled world. Lord, show us the way to peace. Show the world Jesus, Jesus who is the Lord of peace.

And Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. And today, we would pray for the church of Jesus Christ, that sacred mystery.

We pray for our clergy at this time. We pray for David, for our Jims, for Dan, for Eric, for those who come from faraway places and faithfully unfold the word of God for us.

We give you such thanks, Lord, for your servants. We would pray for Archbishop Venables. we pray for Bishop Harvey, for Bishop Harding, for Bishop Ferris, for all throughout the world who stand with us at this time.

Lord, do remember us as we enter another challenge in our life together. We pray, Lord, we pray simply for a just ruling in this case.

[32 : 02] regarding this place, this platform for the gospel. Lord, we do desire this place to remain a platform for the apostolic witness to the mystery of Jesus.

Lord, we commit our future into your most gracious providential care. We thank you, Lord, we thank you so much for your love, a love which is almighty and which will not let us go.

Lord, in your mercy, here. And, Lord, we would pray, of course, this morning, as we always do, we would pray for the suffering.

We remember by name today, Lord, Velva, Ron, we pray for Paul and Howard, we pray for Rowena and Jean, for Zoe, for Ted, we pray for Ben, Lord.

Lord, in a moment of silence, we bring before you those we know, those close to us who stand in need of prayer, who suffer at this time.

[33 : 21] Lord, give to all of these that we have remembered this morning, patience in their suffering, and give to them a living hope in your care, and let them know your power to deliver.

Lord, we pray to you this morning as those belonging to you, as those who are under your perfect care. We pray in the name of Jesus, in this mighty name, this glorious name.

In this name, we pray. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.