

The Job at Hand

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 November 2009

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Fathers, we come now to the end of this road to Jerusalem with Jesus.

Along the way, he's cleared up many misconceptions of what it means to follow you. And now we have the challenge before us. As the words of the old poems say, only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last.

May those words reverberate in our hearts and our minds this morning. And we ask it for your glory. Amen. A team of European doctors in the 1990s, in the early 1990s, discovered that there was a higher chance of having a heart attack on Monday than any other day of the week.

In fact, they found out there was a dramatic increase in all stress-related illnesses on Mondays.

Blood pressure is up, and so you're more likely to have a stroke on a Monday.

Stomach acidity is up, increasing the risk of ulcers. People are twice as likely to commit suicide on Mondays than any other day of the week.

[1 : 16] And so they concluded that the Monday morning feeling is actually no myth. It's medical fact. There was one explanation for it. Most of us feel that the very idea of working another week, depressing.

However, it wasn't because of the workload or the responsibilities. The research found that there was little distinction between a high flyer and what you might call a low flyer, I'm assuming.

People with mundane and undemanding jobs displayed the same symptoms as those at the other end of the scale. No matter how good the job as well, or how considerate the employer, how nice the people you worked with, or even the surrounds in which you work, it made no difference.

The very idea of working another week caused so much stress-related illnesses. And the reason? Purposelessness. Purposelessness is having plenty to do, but no satisfying reason to do it. It's like living life without purpose is kind of like playing soccer without goalposts.

[2 : 38] You can dribble the ball with great skill, you can execute some fine passes, you can enjoy your time on the paddock, but in the end, what's the point? What's the point to it all?

Unless there is some goal, some objective, some reason for doing it, then in the end, it is all a farce. It is this quest for purpose in our daily existence that makes this parable of the ten miners so drastically important for us.

Jesus here provides us with that vital missing link, and that is future perspective. And we need that future perspective in order to give our daily routine significance.

As you know, we have been travelling with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, and as we've been travelling with Jesus, he has encountered a number of people, he has told lots of stories about what it means to be part of his kingdom, he has cleared up misconceptions of what it means to be his disciple, he has told stories like the rich fool and the lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost son and the shrewd manager, he has encountered people like the rich young ruler and the blind beggar, and as he arrives close to Jerusalem, he has one final encounter with a person, and that is with Zacchaeus.

And this encounter with Zacchaeus is where this journey with Jesus comes to its climax. The visit of Jesus to Jericho attracts a large crowd.

[4 : 23] Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, wants a chance to look at Jesus, but he can't because he's too short. Instead, he climbs a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus as he wanders by. The important thing is, though, in that encounter is the fact that Jesus took the initiative.

Verse 5, Zacchaeus, Jesus said to him, Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today. And it's this acceptance of Zacchaeus by Jesus that repulses the crowd.

It says in verse 7, all the people saw this and began to mutter, he has gone to be the guest of a sinner. You see, Zac and his kind were social outcasts, but Jesus welcomes him.

Zacchaeus responds to Jesus by coming out of the tree immediately and it says he received Jesus with joy. A reception of joy to Jesus is the appropriate response on Jesus' actions on our behalf. We also see another response to Jesus by Zac. In verse 8, it says, Look, Lord, here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.

[5 : 38] There are, in fact, two responses there. A new generosity, which means he gives half of his assets to the poor. And secondly, a desire to undo the wrongs from the past.

And he says he will pay back them four times as much anyone that he has robbed. It's interesting that normal restitution only actually added 20%.

If I've robbed you of a dollar, I'll give you a dollar, you know, a dollar, twenty back. But Zacchaeus actually suggests and submits himself to the highest penalty that the Old Testament law required. The highest penalty. You see, what has happened here, God has made the impossible happen. He's done the impossible. A rich man gets through the eye of the needle.

A rich man gets through the eye of the needle and here at the end of this road to Jerusalem, Jesus sets up Zacchaeus as the model disciple.

[6 : 49] The model disciple. He receives the grace of the Lord Jesus with joy and a radical transformation of priorities and his life is a result.

His priorities change because of this new life. It's this new life and his priority which will govern the rest of his life. Which is why Jesus launches into this parable straight after his encounter with Zacchaeus.

Jesus is close to Jerusalem and there are some that are there with Jesus thinking that it's all over. It's about to finish. Jesus the king who's done all these miracles along the way he's going to get to Jerusalem and he's going to beat up the Romans and kick the king out and we're going to go to the palace and we're going to get the temple back.

It's all going to be hunky dory and it's going to be like the good old days we're going to party on and it's kind of the king is established and he's thrown and Jesus goes hang on a bit. Verse 11 Jesus tells this parable because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.

They thought it was almost over. And so Jesus uses this parable to instruct his disciples that salvation as we saw with Zacchaeus is not the end of the matter.

[8 : 12] It's not just a matter of ticking a box and praying a prayer and getting in the kingdom and that's it. Getting into the kingdom of God like Zacchaeus doesn't mean that you just kind of sit back and wait for heaven to come.

You know we fill our pews it's not like church is like a holding pen for Christians waiting for Jesus to come back like a bunch of sheep really in a pen kind of waiting to be shorn. If you're part of the kingdom of God if you respond to Jesus then you've got a job to do until the king comes back. So he says this soon after they arrived in Jerusalem Jesus would be leaving them. In verse 12 he said this a man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.

But the disciples were not meant to be disheartened by this. Yes Jesus was going to leave them he made it clear they were not to be disheartened by this because the king would return.

And the point of this parable is what do they do between when the king leaves and when the king comes back again? What happens in the meantime? Verse 13 So he called in ten of his servants and gave them ten minors, put this money to work until I come back.

[9 : 31] That sentence is Jesus' answer to the dreaded Monday morning feeling. That sentence is the Bible's work ethic.

We've got a job to do for the king until the king comes back. And that gives everything meaning. It gives everything purpose.

And this work ethic is not grounded in a moral duty but in future hope. Future hope. We are to put the king's resources to work until he comes back.

Those few words are desperately important because the world is going somewhere. There is a hope and the king is returning.

Therefore, make the most of the opportunities and the resources we have to invest in the kingdom by working hard for the king. I said this a couple of Sundays ago on Vision Sunday.

[10 : 36] Wise investments. This is what gives our daily routine meaning. It's what gives our daily routine purpose. This is the task that Jesus leaves us with.

And what this parable says is that people are divided into three broad categories depending on how they respond to the challenge from the king. At one extreme are those described in verse 14.

Jesus saying is that there will be some who reject God's king.

They'll reject Jesus being the king. They won't want him to be king. And they won't accept his authority as the king. Some will hide their rebellion against the king under the guise of doubt or ignorance.

But Jesus is clear here that the main resistance to the rule of king Jesus is the will.

[11 : 45] Verse 14. We don't want this man to be our king. We don't want this man to be our king.

But of course it's all in vain because he is the king. Verse 15. He was made king however and he returned home. That's the reality of it. My desire for Jesus not to be king is somehow stronger than the fact he is king.

Nothing can stop Jesus' final triumph. Whether you like it or not, he is king. And the Bible says that people will resist his will, with their will, resist king Jesus right to the very end.

Right to the very end. It astounds me that the Bible says that in the last days when Jesus appears with loud trumpet sounds, people will be confronted with the descending Lord Jesus and instead of bowing and asking for mercy in that last moment of their life, they will say let the mountains fall on me rather than submit to him.

The strength of the will to resist Jesus right to the very end. Nothing can stop Jesus' final triumph.

[13 : 17] He is king. The end of the parable tells us what happened to those who rebelled against the king. Verse 27, but those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and kill them in front of me.

Would have been so nice if he didn't mention that, wouldn't it? It would have been so much nicer if he didn't say it so strongly. But there is no room in God's kingdom for rebels.

It's a harsh verdict, but by it Jesus conveys the hard truth that if you don't want to submit to the king then you have no place in the kingdom. What this parable is saying is that God takes our sin, our rebellion against him very seriously and he will judge all acts of rebellion against him.

sin. The second category of people are at the other end of the extreme. There are those whom Jesus called into this story, the good servants.

Verse 15, he was made king, however, returned home. Then he sent for the servants to those whom he had given money in order to find out what they had gained with it.

[14 : 33] The first one said, sir, your miner has earned ten more. Well done. my good servant. His master replied, because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.

The second came and said, sir, your miner has earned five more. His master answered, you take charge of five cities. I think it's awesome.

What the Bible actually portrays is that our deepest joy and satisfaction is found in serving the king. And this is clearly here as well. That what happens is, when you spend a life of serving king Jesus, what is the reward?

More service. Over ten cities or five cities. More opportunities to serve king Jesus because it's where our deepest satisfaction and joy comes from.

What a wonderful picture. Anyway, that's just a side point. What Jesus is using here is a financial metaphor to describe the sort of trustworthiness that God is working out in those who follow him.

[15 : 43] The minor represents the thing that Jesus left us with. The resources, the endowments, the charge, the mandate, the mandate to go and make disciples of all nations. The things that he wants us to get on with, his business, until he returns.

What he is saying is that it actually matters how we live now. It matters how we order our priorities. It matters what we spend our time doing and how we use the resources that God has given us.

What it's saying is that for those who are part of the kingdom, you don't sit around twiddling your thumbs, kind of just waiting for Jesus to come back. We've got a job to do for the king.

It's saying that we use our resources and opportunities here, now, and they will have eternal consequences. In other words, it is possible to live in such a way now that heaven will actually be enriched for us.

You get that? It is possible to live in such a way now that heaven will actually be enriched for us.

And the mark of a good and trustworthy servant is that they make wise long-term investments.

[17 : 05] They build for the kingdom. This is brilliant news in a world that is full of Monday morning itis.

It means that you can work your guts out in service of the king and it actually counts. It doesn't matter what your job is. It doesn't matter what role you feel in society.

You might be a slave or a master. You might be a husband or a wife. You might be a child or a parent. Every Christian can and should dedicate their daily business to Christ the king.

Do it all as if working for the king. And we do it because we are going somewhere. We have a goal and we have a hope.

But there is one more servant. Verse 20. Then another servant came and said, Sir, here is your minor.

[18 : 04] I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you because you're a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow. The first thing to say about this guy is that his characterization of the king is grossly unfair.

he actually gave his servants responsibility. He is saying that the king is a vicious exploiter of people. He's quite clear from this story in fact that the king is nothing of the kind.

For whatever reason this servant can't bring himself to believe in the kindness and the generosity of the king. He wraps up that little piece of money. I was afraid was his excuse.

I was afraid. Was he afraid that he might not be successful? Maybe. Was he afraid that he might actually miserably fail?

Maybe. But do you know what I think his real problem is? He wasn't afraid enough. He didn't fear the master enough.

[19 : 18] He didn't fear the master. If he had he actually would have done something with that minor. The truth was that he was a wicked servant looking for an excuse for his laziness, for his negligence and for his irresponsibility.

laziness. And Jesus is warning us against laziness. He is telling us that we must work for his kingdom with vision and vigour. We mustn't allow fear to make us withdraw like a turtle into the security of our shell.

We must be prepared to commit ourselves boldly to the kingdom, to kingdom initiatives. we are not to be rash with the resources that God has given us, but we are to make courageous decisions for the king.

I think what Jesus is saying here is that we should never be content as Christians just to kind of happily attend church each week, feel secure and cosy, while the rest of the world is going to hell in a handbasket.

He is telling us not to stay on the sidelines as spectators of other people's enterprise for the kingdom.

[20 : 39] Because too often we do that. Too often we just do that by nature. You go and watch a football team play, you sit up there in the stands, you watch them, if they win you kind of feel like somehow you've contributed to it.

I mean, does anyone boast? I mean, I do that. I think that somehow my cheering has sort of got them over the line. Too often we do that.

We sit on the sideline as spectators of other people's enterprise for the kingdom. That's why I can say that I'm particularly encouraged that the staff of the parish council are not sitting on the sidelines.

They're not sitting on the sidelines. Some of us are crippled by what we perceive to be our lack of resources. You know, if I could preach like Billy Graham, I'd be an evangelist.

Or if I was any good at languages, I'd be a missionary. If I could do music, I'd sort of bump Nick from his job.

[21 : 45] If I was academic, I'd go to Bible college. If I wasn't so shy, I'd evangelise my friends. If I had more money, I'd be able to give. I had more time, I could do church ministry more.

If only, if only, if only God had not given me so little to work with. It's his fault in the end. God isn't interested in the hypothetical devotion that we would give if we had the resources.

The irony of this faithless servant is that in trying to avoid taking risks, he was in fact taking the greatest risk of all.

Gambling with his place in the kingdom, gambling with his life. God's life. Well, friends, sorry to say, but it's going to be Monday again tomorrow, and you could wake up depressed and miserable as

people who are going nowhere, like all the purposeless people who drive here, past you on a Monday morning, going to their offices in their fancy cars.

Or you could be motivated and ambitious as people who know that you have a hope, a purpose, and a reason, and a job to do, using the king's resources to build up treasure in heaven, and enriching your experience and other people's experience of heaven until he comes.

[23 : 31] The message for us as we get near Jerusalem with Jesus, over these whole number of weeks as we're travelled with Jesus, is quite simple.

Honour the king. Live for the king. All of our lives are on the way to eternity.

Jesus has gone. He's left. After his resurrection, after his ascension, and his glorification, and he sits on the throne now.

And the day has been set when he will return. And all of our lives are on the way to eternity. An eternity with Christ, or a Christ-less eternity.

And so, in the words of the old poem, only one life will soon be passed, only what's done for Christ will last.

[24 : 39] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.