

Matthew 25:14-40

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[0 : 00] Amen. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray. Lord, as we turn to your word,! It's quite emotional seeing all the kids' face last night on Zoom.

So come and join us. There's a link on the website for Zoom this evening at 6 o'clock. Now, we're in Matthew 25, and we're realising that as we listen to Jesus, that we've been led into a secret.

As we belong to him, Jesus has led us in on a secret. And once you've been led in on the secret, nothing's ever the same again. You can never think like somebody who doesn't believe again.

If you picture two people, they're on a train. They're two metres apart. In a carriage. There's two people on a train. And one of them is living a pretty aimless life, just trotting along.

The other one, next week, is getting married. And everything for that second person is governed by that big event that's happening. That person who's about to enter into their life and change everything.

[1 : 31] Or think of two people that, one of them is out of work, and one of them is looking for a job. The other one has an appointment next week to meet with a CEO to discuss a new job.

And for that second individual, everything is being governed by that meeting. The way they think, the way they live, is being governed by that. And the way that we think, and we live, and who we've been called by Jesus, we've been told that we have a meeting with Jesus.

That one day he will come again. And that meeting will take place, and it sheds light on everything that we do in this world. And so in Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus strings together, reminder after reminder, that he is coming again.

And that we are going to meet him. And we saw last week, that we need to be ready for that day. Like those wise bridesmaids, that have not only got lamps, but have got oil. And we see this week, in this parable, that we've just read, that we are to be productive.

And we are to be responsible, in how we live. And we will one day have to give an account. The parable, it's about a master who has three servants. Two are faithful, one is not.

[2 : 43] And it's the only parable, where the master gives different talents, different resources, to different servants. Five to one. Two to the second.

And one to the last. And so four questions this morning. Number one, what does it mean to be faithful? Does that mean successful? Second, what is this reward?

Is it a kind of promotion? Third question, what is unfaithfulness? Unfaithfulness. And what is going on with this kind of weird servant? And then the last question, is what about the punishment?

And is it unfair? There are four brief questions. Is anybody with me? Any of you? Two of you at least. First of all, what is unfaithfulness? Verses 14 and 15, 15 of chapter 25, a man is on a journey. It's obviously Jesus. He is leaving. He entrusts property to three servants. And he gives them basically resources. I know the word talent.

[3 : 47] Talent. We often use for an ability, or a gift, or a skill. But actually, the word talent is a currency word. And it's a very big currency word.

It's the word we might replace with a million. So a talent is a huge amount of money, almost a million. So the servant goes to the first servant. The master goes to the first servant, and he gives him five million.

Second servant, he gives two million. Third servant, he gives one million. It doesn't mean that he's given five abilities. That's how it's sometimes translated. But I suppose, if we were going to think about what does it mean, it means for us everything that we've been given by God.

So resources, abilities, opportunities. What do you have which has been given to you? The brain you've got. The gifts that you've got.

The resources. The plenty, or maybe they're not so much. Whatever it is the Lord has given to you, we may summarize as a talent to be used in his servant.

[4 : 58] And so, servant number one, if you look at verse 16, he starts at once. He's obviously faithful. He's obviously keen. The second servant, verse 17, seems to do the same. Servant number three, however, buries the talent in the ground.

And we know, that's not completely crazy. We know from another parable that people did that, didn't they? They buried treasure in the ground. It was kind of a cheap bank. And so burying in the ground was a way of keeping it safe, of not doing anything with it.

And before we see the challenge that the parable finishes with, I want us to face that. Before we get to the challenge, I want you to see the comfort this morning. Because the comfort in the first 10 of the 18 verses is to encourage you.

Just note, the two men are given all that they need to be faithful. Are they not shortchanged? Are they not sent out to do something which is too difficult?

The master does not ask impossible things of his people. He doesn't ask you to pull a rabbit out of a hat or to create success.

[6 : 13] He doesn't say, I'm sending you off with nothing and I want you to produce masses. I've been trying to download episodes of the A-Team. The A-Team was kind of a 1980s show.

You can pay for it on YouTube ridiculously. But do you remember, there was a scene in the A-Team in every episode where the A-Team were stuck in a garage and in the garage there was a wheelbarrow, a basketball and a can of petrol.

And the next scene was the A-Team would have created a Sherman tank and out they come with guns firing. They made enormous things out of nothing. But Jesus isn't like that. He doesn't say, I'm giving you nothing and I want you to produce masses.

And then these men use what they have. Do you notice, it's not super success. They don't come out with a thousand percent increase. It's not fast either.

It seems to take the whole of their lives. The Master is away, verse 19, for a very long time. The five produce five, the two produce two. And the response from the Master is as good as you could hope for.

[7 : 25] He looks at his servants and he edits one of the most remarkable and beautiful sentences in the whole of the Bible. He says, well done, good and faithful servant.

And he says exactly the same thing to the man who had the five talents as the guy who had two talents. And so I want to remind you this morning, and this is most of you who serve the Lord at home or in work, in the world, in church, and nobody gets what you do or it feels like that.

Maybe you think nobody sees what you do. Maybe nobody appreciates what you do, you think. No one understands what you do, but you are seeking as you can to put God's word into practice.

And this sentence from Jesus Christ is going to totally compensate. I'm not saying it's easy to wait for that sentence. We know it's not. I'm not saying we shouldn't encourage one another as we wait for this sentence.

But I am telling you that Jesus, these words from Jesus will outweigh every cost and every struggle at the end. So before you use this parable this morning, as some of you will do to terrify yourselves, one of the tragedies of passages like this is people who should be comforted will burden themselves and people who should wake up to themselves will care nothing at all.

[8 : 55] It's always the danger. A sermon that's meant to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable ends up comforting the comfortable. So before you terrify yourself this morning, I hope you will remember that this master is a great and gracious master who gives abundant resources.

And what he asks of you is willing service, not superhuman service. the sort of service that says I would like to use what I have and you will discover that as you do that God is thrilled by such faithfulness.

So faithfulness means that you are looking at what God has given you and you are thinking how can I use what God has given me? How can I do what he's asked me to do? How can I use the opportunities that only you have?

How can I use the time that God has given? So the second question, what's the reward? And we can't push all the details in the parable too far, but you'll see the reward in verses 21 and verse 23 is commendation.

Well done. And it means greater usefulness. You've been good in a few things, I'll now give you many things. And thirdly, come and enter my happiness.

[10:16] happiness. These three things are the reward in the parable, the commendation of Jesus. And again, I say to you, you will value that day and his approval immeasurably.

And if you focus on Jesus' approval, it will free you from many dangers and disappointments. The commendation of Jesus, wait for it.

The second thing is that reward, isn't it, of greater faithfulness. Verse 21 and verse 23, you've been faithful in a few things, I'll now entrust you with many things. It's ironic, isn't it, that the man who's been given five million has been told you've been faithful with a few things.

A few things. What could the reward be if you've been given five million? And you're now going to receive many things. Luke says in his equivalent passage, you've been given a few coins, you've done well with a few coins, now I'm going to give you some cities.

It's almost absurd. It's almost as if the master is going crazy with reward and affection. And we want to remember that our master is incredibly generous.

[11:34] And the reason I'm telling you this is because when we come to the third servant, if you've got bad views of the master, it will affect everything. The third part of the reward is that we're invited to share in our master's happiness, literally to enter into the joy of the master.

And that could mean entering a joyful place, but it may well mean that I want you to enter into my joy. I think that's the sense of the passage. The master is saying, I want you to rejoice like I rejoice. I want you to experience what I experience. I want you to know what perfect joy is. And so who is the happiest person in the universe?

It's the living God. And that's not because he's careless about suffering and sadness, those things grieve him, but God knows exactly what he's doing.

And nothing gets in his way. And he wants you and I to share in his joy. And when you consider how tragic it is that people look away from the Lord Jesus Christ for joy and for satisfaction and their happiness, that idea there is that if I just become wealthy, if I just accumulate and I spend it on myself, suddenly I'll be satisfied.

[13:00] It never comes. satisfies. That if I get personal satisfaction, we know that it never really satisfies. It fills the void for just a little bit, doesn't it?

Getting what you dream of. Only a little time. But the long-term effect of accumulating and hoarding and holding and not releasing is actually deep dissatisfaction.

And even more seriously, self-preoccupation. and the inability to serve or sacrifice for someone else, the corrupting of our values. And I think there's a danger in the situation we're in at the moment.

We know that we face that danger that when money rules the day, ethical decisions become economic decisions. When money rules the day, ethical decisions become economic decisions. And when that happens, you're really in trouble. you're really in trouble as an individual, as a family, as a community, and as a nation. Well, we've been made for Christ.

[14:06] It is good fellowship with him that will give us deep joy and peace. And there's no peace like his peace. And no joy like his joy.

And his reward is immeasurable. Number three, okay? What is unfaithfulness? Now, I think we know what unfaithfulness is. But what drives unfaithfulness?

What is it that drives it? Because in Matthew 25 and verse 24, the servant who buried the talent has got a problem with the master. Have you noticed that?

He's got a problem with the master. He says, you are a hard man and you don't sow, but you somehow expect to harvest. You don't scatter, but you expect to gather. Well, in the face of your hardness, master, I hid from fear what you've given to me, verse 25.

And so we've got to ask, where does this kind of thinking come from? Because there are people who think like that about God. There are people in churches who think like that about God.

[15:09] I don't really know exactly where it comes from. It might come from bad teaching or bad modelling. It could be some kind of perversity. Where does this idea come from that God is a ruthless tyrant?

Well, we know, don't we, that it's certainly got echoes from Genesis 3. The serpent comes, doesn't he, and he sows that idea to the man and the woman. And he puts it in their head that this God, the God who's given them all the beauty of the garden and everything in creation to enjoy all the trees,

all the perfection, that this God is actually holding something out on you.

He's actually a bit of a sadist. He's a cruel tyrant. And when you begin to think like that of God, it affects the way you behave.

It's so completely different from the biblical picture. And if you find yourself unbalanced in this area, can I really encourage you this week to look through your Bible, to collect every verse, to balance up and even up and even perfect a proper doctrine of God.

Think of verses like Isaiah 30 verse 18, the Lord longs to be gracious. He rises to show compassion. That's the God of the Bible. And there's something disturbing going on here.

[16:32] Where the servant says to the master, you are a bit of a tyrant. The master, of course, doesn't agree, verses 26 and 27. And he says, even if what you're saying was true, the logical thing, wouldn't it have been better if you just put the money in a bank?

If you were telling the truth, surely it would have been better just stick it in the bank and get some interest. But this servant is actually speaking very sinisterly. And the problem is not the master. The master, do you remember, he gives everything that his people need. And he does not take or squeeze us or treat us unfairly. The fatal sentence is there in verse 26.

It's where the master lifts the lid on the servant. And he sees right through this excuse of fear, this ridiculous idea, and he strips away the excuses and he says, it's a very disturbing line, isn't it?

This servant is wicked and lazy. The problem is not the master, it's the servant. I remember seeing a fridge magnet which said, Jesus is coming, look busy.

[17:41] And it's just repeating, isn't it, that kind of double insult, that he's a bit of a looming tyrant. looming tyrant, but you can fool him.

You can get him off your back. And that is a double insult. The fact of the matter is Jesus is not, God is not a looming tyrant. He's a gracious heavenly father. And he deserves none of our insults. And he's also one that sees through our excuses. One commentator says, this third servant has the philosophy play safe. People do play safe, don't they?

They say, I don't want to get hurt. I don't want to be insulted. I don't want people to think badly of me. I'm just going to bury everything.

I'm going to be a secret disciple. But the truth is, you cannot be a secret disciple. Because either your secrecy kills your discipleship, or your discipleship will kill your secrecy.

[18:45] The third servant's philosophy is do no harm, isn't it? Old Bishop Ryle, he says, this is the philosophy of the stone, not the servant.

It's a great sentence, the philosophy of the stone on the ground to say, I do no harm. Bearing your responsibility according to this parable, conducting your Christianity as a private thing, being an invisible member of Christ's fellowship, coasting, traveling, being a passenger, refusing to do what he asks you to do, will lead to you being exposed.

and I greatly fear for people who think that they're getting away with it because it's just impossible on the last day. Last question, what is the punishment?

It looks, doesn't it, really excessive in verses 28 to 30. The gifts are taken away, the servant is sent away into darkness, which is a code word in the rest of Matthew for hell.

And you wonder if the servant has really been over punished when you first read it. You might wonder, well has he lost his salvation?

[20:06] The answer to that is the man never had salvation. He had a whole life of being asked to respond to the master, but he chose to refuse.

And reject the master for the whole life, and now his time is gone. He's obviously treated the master as an enemy and refused to serve him. And it sounds, doesn't it, just like an unbeliever being exposed to what he is.

Just like in Matthew 21 with the fig tree, it had leaves, it was all leaves, but no fruit. Or the bridesmaids from last week, they've got lamps, but they've not got oil.

And this man wanted to distance himself from the master, and run his own life, and forget about what he was obligated to do. And now he gets his wish full blown.

C.S. Lewis said on one occasion, if you stand outside the door of the kingdom of God, and you're invited to go in, and you say no, and you're invited to go in again, and you say no, and you're invited to go in again, and you say no, then when the door closes, and you find yourself outside, you can't be surprised that you're outside.

[21 : 27] Well, of course, all of us deserve this treatment. We've treated God badly, and we have. We've viewed him badly. Our rebellion deserves the casting away, but there's a word, isn't there, that we can't read in this passage without it triggering another memory.

The word darkness. darkness. Because we can't read the word darkness without remembering that there was someone else who has experienced darkness for us. The one reason that you and I can be at peace, the one reason that you and I, even in this situation, can keep going forward with joy, the one reason that even today, in the midst of this awful situation, we can be glad of forgiveness, and the future in front of us, is because this person, Jesus, voluntarily went into the darkness.

And he acted like he was the rebellious servant for us, so that we might be treated as the utterly faithful servant. And it's incredible that what took place at the cross, when Jesus went through with the crucifixion, was that he took all the darkness and all the rebellious, rebellion of servants like you and like me that we deserve, and he dealt with it.

And he took it, and he consumed it, and he gives to you and us the status of servants and sons, and the huge privilege of serving a heavenly father with the resources that he has given to us, that he has provided, to serve him with the strength that he gives us, for the days that he gives us, for a reward, at the end of the world, which will outweigh the world.

He is incredible. And the Lord has given to every believer gifts and graces, and the key is to be willing, not to be successful, but to say, Lord, here's the day that you've given me, and here are the gifts that you've given to me, and here are the graces that you've given to me, how can I be useful to you today?

[23 : 49] Because the way you live your life will say a lot about how you view the master. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we praise you because you are God and there is no other.

You are our rock and our refuge. You are a very present help in trouble. We thank you for your word.

We thank you for how you've spoken to us through it. We thank you that it cuts us, that it is so clear. We thank you for the gifts that you've given to your people.

Lord, we've seen that even this week. And we want to pray that you will help us, Heavenly Father, to use our time wisely and well, to serve you knowing that you are a generous master who gives all that we need.

[24 : 58] And Father, we come to you in our need and our dependence this morning. And we ask you for help. We know that you are sovereign and that you are all-powerful and that you are good.

We want to pray for those in our congregation that are unwell. We ask that you might strengthen them. We ask that you might heal them and keep them.

we pray that you would give to the doctors and the nurses treating them skill. Heavenly Father, we pray for those who are anxious about their family members and worried.

Lord, we pray that you would grant them that peace which transcends all understanding, that it would guard their heart and their mind in Christ Jesus and that they would know that they are in your hands and you are the almighty God.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you would keep us from a wrong fear. We pray that you would help us to live day by day using this time that you've given to us wisely.

[26 : 12] We thank you for our government, for the health services, for all those in authority. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that you would give a supernatural strength to those caring for others, that you would bless them and their families, that you would strengthen them for the task that is ahead.

We pray, gracious God, that you would use this situation to turn many back to you. Lord, we're aware that we have no answers and we are fragile and life is very brief.

And so, gracious God, may, in your sovereignty, in your power, would you turn many to yourself. Heavenly Father, we ask you to forgive our sins.

As we read this passage, we're aware, Lord, there are many ways we've been unfaithful. There are things we've said this week, things we've done, things that we should have done, and we ask your forgiveness.

And we thank you that you are gracious and you are forgiving. And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin. Lord, watch over us this day, for we pray all these things.

[27 : 29] In Jesus' strong name, Amen. Amen. Amen.