

Busy Waiting?

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[0 : 00] The words of the Lord Jesus Christ, the words of the living God. Please keep that page open and we'll think about his words together.! I don't know about you. I'm not very good at waiting, always.

A few months ago I had to get tires changed on the car, so I took the car to the garage and there were a couple of cars ahead of me and so I waited 20 minutes and eventually the car made it into the garage.

20 minutes later and there was a new set of tires on the car, but it was only 20 minutes after that that I pulled the car out of the garage because there was another car that I pulled in behind me and was also getting its tires changed.

And as these kind of 20 minutes passed, I got more and more unsettled, restless, began pacing up and down, checking my watch, sticking my head out of the door in quite a passive-aggressive way to let them know that I was still here.

And eventually I asked them, when can I get my car out? And he said, 20 minutes. 20 minutes. We're not good at waiting, are we? We want to get going. There are things to do and there are places to be.

[1 : 55] And I think most of us, maybe, as we open our Bibles this morning and we think about Jesus' future coming, probably expect Jesus to say, you need to be better at waiting.

Right? You need to grow in patience. Calm down. Calm down. Actually, what is Jesus saying in this parable? Not quite that, is it?

Don't waste your time waiting. Be busy while you wait. There are things to do, places to be. Get going. Now, that's great to hear, isn't it?

We're busy doing things and Jesus is saying, be busy. Do things. So, why does that make us a bit nervous? Right?

Why aren't we delighted that the Bible affirms our restlessness this morning? Well, to put it a different way, why do we need to be told this if it comes so naturally to us?

[2 : 55] Why did Jesus need to teach this to his disciples? Well, because our busyness is not always his busyness, is it?

My desperation to get on with my day isn't necessarily what Jesus is commending here. The question at the heart of this parable, brothers and sisters, is not are we busy, but are we busy with his work while we wait?

Are we working hard to grow his portfolio? Are we busy trading in the currency of his kingdom? This is the second parable in Jesus' fifth and final block of teaching to his disciples in Matthew's gospel. Sometimes it's known as the Olivet Discourse. And it's all about us being ready for his return. Last time in the parable of the ten virgins or bridesmaids, we heard about our need to be personally prepared for his coming.

Like the ten bridesmaids in the story, it's each of our responsibility to make sure that we are ready for his second coming. And we heard there is a warm welcome for us, waiting if we are, but a door closed in our face if we're not.

[4 : 19] But in this parable today, Jesus unpacks more of what being ready means. What does he have in mind when he says things like, stay awake and watch and be ready?

Well, it will be like this, says Jesus. And he goes on to tell a story about a man who goes away on a long trip and entrusts his wealth into the hands of three servants.

And it's how those servants handle the master's riches while he's away that is the difference in the end between his commendation and his condemnation, between well done and take him away.

So let's walk through Jesus' story then, drawing out that big lesson as we go, beginning with our first point, Christ has put his riches in our hands.

Jesus begins, verse 14, For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.

[5 : 33] Then he went away. It's fairly obvious, isn't it, when Jesus speaks about a man going away on a trip, that he's speaking about his own departure.

Later on, we find out it's for a long time, so not a day trip. It's a significant period. And in fact, we're still living in it, 2,000 years later.

But as the man goes in the story, he leaves his wealth in the care of his servants. Now, a talent, it was a sum of money worth about 20 years' wages for a laborer.

You might have a little note at the bottom of the page in your Bible that tells you that. So, he's clearly a very wealthy man. In total, he hands out 160 years' worth of wages.

But notice that he doesn't spread his wealth evenly among the servants. One gets five, another gets two, another gets one. To each according to his ability, says Jesus.

[6 : 36] So, some are entrusted with more than others while the master is gone. So, what is all this about? Christ has told his disciples he's going away and will come back.

But now he is telling them that he's going to give them something to take care of while he is gone. What are these riches then?

Well, interestingly, I found out in the week that this parable is where we get the English word talent from. As in, you're very talented. But we do need to be a bit careful, don't we, not to import into the text what we think of as talents.

You know, I think we know instinctively that Jesus is not declaring his love to talent shows, don't we? So, what is it? Well, what has Jesus given us while he's away?

In fact, think of something that Jesus hasn't given you, right? In the truest sense, every single thing that we have comes from him.

[7 : 50] Our bodies, our minds, our personalities, our interests, our energy and drive, our possessions, our income, our homes, our families, our friends, our gifts.

Everything that we have is ultimately from his hand. Above all, I think, in Matthew's gospel, the gospel has been given to us by him, the message of his everlasting rule and reign.

And our ability to grasp that message and live out that message and share that message with others. Friends, if you're a Christian, you know that nothing about you is by accident.

You are not who you are by chance. The Lord Jesus has given you everything that you have, both inwardly and outwardly, out of the riches of his grace.

And Jesus recognizes in this parable, doesn't he, that we're all different. I don't think we should overthink the different quantities of cash that the master gives the servants.

[9 : 05] The point isn't that some people are kind of better off than others. In fact, even one talent is a very, very rich gift to receive. The point, I think, is that we all have different opportunities to serve him.

And he doesn't give us more responsibility than we can handle. He's entrusted us with as much as he knows that we can do. And I don't know about you, but this morning I need to hear that.

It's a big relief to me that I do not have to be one of these big-name preachers or theologians and evangelists who everyone's heard of to properly serve the Lord Jesus.

Because Jesus isn't asking me to do that. He's given that responsibility to those to whom he's given the ability to do it. Friends, Jesus is not asking you to use what you haven't got.

He's not asking you to spend time that you don't have doing things that are beyond your capability to do. He is not asking you to spend money that you don't have to fund projects that you can't complete.

[10 : 17] He's not asking us to teach people that we don't know, things that we don't understand. It should free us to know that what Jesus expects us to use for him is what he's given us to use.

We don't need to come into church and be envious of one another's gifts or service. We don't need to try to kind of out-serve each other.

His service has been given to him. Her gifts are her gifts, not your gifts. Brothers and sisters, this parable gives us permission to be different from each other.

And therefore, as we'll see, to serve in different ways. But the point for now is that every servant of the Lord Jesus has been entrusted with valuable riches from him.

There is no Christian who has anything less than treasure in these jars of clay.

[11:20] However weak you feel your grasp of the gospel is, you have the gospel. However little time or opportunity or ways to serve you feel you have, well, you have another day to live for the Lord Jesus.

However small or maybe on the edge of a big church family like this you feel, you have a church family to partner with in worship and in witness.

All of us, from the youngest Christian to the oldest Christian here, have opportunity, resources, and gifts that have been put into our hands by the risen and reigning and returning King Jesus.

And as he's taught us throughout this gospel, so he teaches us now that it's all to come under his lordship. All to be put in the service of his kingdom.

You sometimes Christians can feel, I don't know what I have to offer. I don't know how I can serve. If that's you this morning, let me encourage you that Jesus has given you something to serve him with.

[12:31] This parable reminds us there's no such thing as a poor Christian. Even the poorest servant is given a very, very valuable gift by the master.

Friends, the king has given you something to offer. And if you're wondering what that is, well, just ask, what has he given me? And what has he given me now in this season of life?

Not what do they have? What do they do? What don't I have that they have? Friends, the master is not asking you to use what you don't have, but what you do have.

And it comes from the riches of his grace towards you. Christ has put riches in the hands of every one of his servants. Now, I wonder if you noticed that even though the master gives the servants three different amounts, the servants actually only respond in two ways.

And our next two points are really going to explore those two responses. So, secondly, then, Christ will commend us for putting his riches to good use. Now, have a look at verse 16.

[13:46] He who'd received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So, also, he who had the two talents made two talents more.

But he who'd received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. So, the servants who received the five and the two talents go out with some urgency and put it to work. And it pays off. They both double what the master gave them. We'll come back to the third servant in our next point, because the story quickly moves on to the master's return.

And pretty soon, he wants to know what's been happening with his riches. So, the five-talent servant comes and brings his extra five talents. And the master is unsurprisingly delighted.

See verse 21. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

[14:51] Then the two-talent servant comes with his extra two talents. And this is really important. Even if you didn't pick out verse 21 a minute ago, just find verse 23 now in your Bible.

Have a look. See if you can spot the difference between what the master says to this servant. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

What's the difference?

There is no difference. The master says the same thing to both. Why is that important? Because it tells us that the master's delight and approval isn't about how much we had to begin with or how much we bring in the end.

One servant brings back more than the master gave out in total at the start and he gets a very warm welcome. The other servant brought less than half as much as the first servant but is welcomed just as warmly.

[16:07] The master is equally happy with them both. Why? Well, because he says both were faithful. Faithful with what they had to serve him with while he was away.

Both put his riches to good use. Now isn't that such an antidote to our pride? We want people to notice us, don't we?

How hard we're serving or the ways that we're serving or how long we've been serving. We want our gifts to be recognized, appreciated, a special thank you.

In the end, the only person whose recognition really matters will give the same welcome and well done to the weakest Christian with the fewest ways to serve and the Christian with the longest record of service in the church.

You preached to thousands, wrote books, set up charities, started churches. Well done, good and faithful servant. You smiled at people as they came into church.

[17:18] You prayed for the same two or three people every day. You encouraged others in their service. Well done, good and faithful servant.

I think that kind of answers the question, what counts as trading or investing the master's money? What do we have to be about to be good and faithful?

Well, I don't think there's a kind of set list of things to tick off. It's not quite the same as being on a church rota, though that is a good thing. It's doing what we can for the Lord by using what we have from the Lord.

Think about it. Who is being more faithful? The elderly, housebound woman who quietly prays and speaks to the two or three carers who come in each day about Jesus?

Or the outgoing young guy with loads of friends who he half-heartedly invites to the carol service once a year? Different scope, different opportunities, but one is making full use of what she's been given.

[18:28] The other isn't. How about the person with crippling anxiety who quietly attends worship each Sunday and speaks to a few people on the door on the way out?

Or the Taipei personality who's on three different serving teams but only comes to church when they're on the rota? The person who has lots of Bible knowledge who doesn't go to the Bible study to share it?

Or the new Christian with no Bible knowledge who does go and asks great questions and encourages everyone in Jesus? We all have different abilities to serve in different ways.

The question is, are we making good use of what Christ has given us to serve him with? That should deeply encourage those of us who feel we have few ways to serve, not much to give, but it might also challenge others of us in our comfort and complacency.

We can't use what we don't have, but are you using what you have been given to the fullest that you realistically can? Naturally, there are seasons of life, family illness, pressures at work, when we can't maybe serve the Lord in the ways that we once did or that we would like to.

[19:49] But it is significant, isn't it, I think, that the five-talent servant didn't bring back another two, but another five. Neither was he slow about it, but went at once about the master's business.

Is the Lord's investment going as far as it ought to be in your hands? Or are there areas of your life where, if you're honest, you could be more faithful with the opportunities that you have been given?

Have you maybe come out of the other side of a tougher season, but never really got back to full capacity in the Lord's service? Are you being faithful over what Jesus has put in your care?

This is a great time of year for us, isn't it, to reflect, take stock of where we are, maybe reset, if we need to, for another year ahead. We often think, don't we, about the ways that Jesus has brought us joy at this time of year.

Joy is so precious to us, isn't it? But do you know it goes both ways? What brings Jesus joy? Or what does the master commend about these servants?

[21:08] What does he say? Their faithfulness. They are good and faithful servants. They have been faithful over a little. And the master, what does he say, rejoices? Simply that the servants have kept doing and gaining for him with what he had given them.

Isn't it wonderful to know, brothers and sisters, that after our long years of faithful service here, we will enter into his joy. His joy.

I don't know what word you would have put at the end of that sentence. I wouldn't have picked joy. Enter into my kingdom. Enter into my rest. Into my peace.

Enter into my joy. Enter into my life. Enter into my life. Enter into my life. Enter into my life. Enter into my life. Some of you are probably feeling a bit worn out on the last Sunday of the year.

Hopefully we've all had a bit of time to relax over the last couple of days.

Sometimes, though, that can just make us realize how tired we actually are. And January's just around the corner. At the end of another year, maybe you struggle to see the fruit of your labors.

[22:19] And you wonder what it's all been for. Was it worth it? What's been gained for all that has been done? Well, at the end of another year, brothers and sisters, let me encourage you, if you're

finding yourself growing a bit weary of the work, that Christ rejoices over you with singing.

That as he sees your faithful toil in his service, his heart delights in you. Friends, let the joy of the Lord be your strength as you look ahead to another year of faithful service.

Let me encourage you to find some time over the next few days as another year begins to look forward with hope to the everlasting joy of the Lord Jesus. You know, I don't know quite what it means to enter into his joy, but I take it it's the same as entering into his eternal kingdom.

So that when we will enter into the new heavens and the new earth, then we will enter into you and dwell in the joy of the Lord forever.

That is worth living for, isn't it? Serving for, pressing on for. Brothers and sisters, live to hear his well done, good and faithful servant. Let the promise of his joy keep you going as you live for him and as you serve him.

[23 : 52] But sadly, that isn't where this parable ends, because if one is a response which the master commends, well, there is another response which the master condemns.

This is our third point. Christ will condemn those who do nothing with his riches. And Jesus is clear, not little, but nothing. Verse 18 says, he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

So it's not that he tried hard to invest the master's riches, but just wasn't successful. It's that he didn't do anything with it at all.

Now, it's super important that we see why he did that and he says why in verse 24. He also who had received the one talent came forward saying, Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, gathering where you scattered no seed, and so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground.

Now, does that sound to you like the master that we have seen so far in the parable? A hard man to please?

[25 : 09] Someone that you would be afraid to work for? The question that we should be asking when we hear the servant say this is, does the servant know the master at all?

I hope you got some lovely gifts this week that made you feel really known, really loved. That's why we kind of try hard, isn't it, to pick the right gift at Christmas because we want what we give to someone to say, I know what brings you joy.

I know what makes you tick. I get you. A bad present can say the opposite, can't it? We open it and we say, oh, you don't really know me. See, the difference between this servant and the others isn't only or even mainly what he didn't do or didn't give.

The difference is in his relationship to the master. He acted out of fear because he viewed the master as a tyrant and a bully. He didn't know the master and so he didn't really know what would please him.

I hope this didn't happen to you on Christmas morning but imagine pulling a present out from under the tree and on it is a tag that says, I know you're impossible to please and will find something wrong with whatever I give you so I've just wrapped up what you gave me for Christmas last year because I guess that's what you wanted.

[26 : 40] Right? What would go through your head? How would that feel? Well, that is in effect what the third servant does, isn't it? I know you're a hard man and nothing's ever enough for you so I was afraid and hid what you gave me and now I'm giving it you back.

What does that say about his relationship to the master? Friends, if I can put it really clearly like this, it's not what we do for Jesus that gets us into heaven and it's not what we don't do for him that puts us in hell.

It's not what we give to Jesus that gets us into heaven and it's not what we don't give to Jesus that puts us in hell. It's how we know and love Jesus that gets us into heaven and it's how we don't know and don't love Jesus that puts us in hell and one of the points of this parable is whether or not we live for him and serve him as Christians shows whether we know and love Jesus at all.

It's a fair conclusion to draw from someone's life that if they are not living for and serving as a Christian, they do not know or love Christ. Now, here and now, that's a difficult thing to be sure of. There's lots that we don't see that we don't know, but what we do know from the mouth of Christ is that there will be people on the last day like this servant who have thought that they did what Jesus wanted, who in fact have never truly known him. And Jesus' response to that is clear, verse 26. His master answered him, you wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I have not sown

and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

He calls that servant wicked and lazy. Wicked because of the way that he's viewed the master. Lazy, I guess, because, well, what's he been doing all the time the master's been away? Not serving his interests, but serving his own interests. In fact, as the master, it's obvious how unbothered you were because you didn't even have the initiative to put the money in the bank to earn two percent a year.

[29 : 23] And so what he was entrusted with is taken away and given to a faithful servant. And worse still, he says, verse 30, cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Friends, if you would call yourself a Christian this morning, what is there in your life to show for it?

If I can put it this way, what gifts will you present to Jesus when he comes to show him that you have truly known him and loved him? It's not the gifts, it's not the service that saves us, but it's what they say about our relationship with him. As James puts it in his letter, show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

If you're a servant of the Lord Jesus, how are you serving him? If he is your Lord, how are you obeying him? If the answer truthfully is not at all, let his words warn you this morning.

It's time to stop living for yourself and turn and bow the knee to King Jesus. Friends, are you ready for Christ's return? The question that Jesus puts to us as we think about that is, are we busy in the work of his kingdom while we wait for him?

[31 : 04] Let's go into a new year ready to live for our king, ready to serve him afresh, because we are ready for his coming again in glory.

Let's pray that we be true together. Merciful Lord, we thank you as we bow before you, that you have given us gifts.

We thank you that our merit, our salvation with you, is not based upon what we can do for you, what we have given you, but what you have given us through your life, death, and resurrection.

Lord, we pray that our faith would not be unfruitful, Lord, that we would be truly faithful in your service.

Father, keep us, we pray, from lip service to ye that isn't borne out in hearts and lives changed by your grace. Father, we pray that you would give rest and comfort to those who are weary this morning.

[32 : 10] Lord, hope and joy to those who feel that we cannot serve anymore. Lord, keep our eyes fixed upon the promise of the joy that we will enter into in the end.

Father, for those of us who are not sure how we can serve you, help us, Lord, encourage us that even the smallest service of you is considered great, wonderful, and praiseworthy by you.

And Father, those of us who have been slack in our service, convict and challenge us, we pray, that our love for you might grow, and out of our love might flow good works.

We commit ourselves to you, Lord, on this last Lord's Day of the Year, and ask that you would continue to sanctify us, and set us apart and make us a people whose love for you is evident.

Lord, for by this we will be known, our love for one another. And this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.