

Matthew 25:1-46 // The Master's Absence:Character:Servant

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[0 : 00] But the man who'd received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five.

Master, he said, you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I've gained five more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servants.

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 man with two bags of gold also came.

Master, he said, you entrusted me with two bags of gold. See, I've gained two more. His master replied, well done, good and faithful servants.

[1 : 00] You've been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness. Then the man who'd received one bag of gold came.

Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you've not sown and gathering where you've not scattered seed. So I was afraid, and I went out and hid your gold in the ground.

See, here is what belongs to you. His master replied, you wicked, lazy servant. So you knew that I harvest where I've not sown and gather where I've 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 ten 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.

[2 : 16] This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Thanks, Rob. Thanks for reading that so helpfully. Friends, good evening.

Great to be with you, and a real privilege to be opening up God's word. Keep Matthew 25 open, because that'll be helpful for you. There's an outline in your handout. Let's pray as we come to God's word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks. And that you haven't left us by ourselves to work out, to guess who you are and what you've done for us.

That you've given us your word. And your word encourages us. And your word challenges us. And so with this challenge from Matthew 25, we pray that you would speak to us this evening, that you might change us to be good and faithful servants.

And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. I was chatting a couple of months ago to someone after church who had become a Christian in the last couple of years.

[3 : 28] And he was sharing with me about his attempts to talk to people at the gym about Jesus. And it hadn't been going all that well.

And so he was talking about how he would share about Jesus. And then they would ask questions. And we didn't know the answers to the questions that they were coming back at him with.

And there were videos that he'd seen online, little sort of short clips on YouTube that he'd found helpful. And he would show them these videos. And, well, they just weren't picking up what he was putting down. And he was reflecting on this to me.

And he said, I just don't have everything figured out yet. Like, I'm only a new Christian. Like, should I wait until I sort of know a bit more than I do now before I share Jesus?

Because I feel like I should know the answers to the questions that they're asking. I feel like a bit of an imposter. And I think that anyone who has tried to live for Jesus, like, tried to do the thing that's a little bit beyond our comfort zone, put our neck out a little bit in evangelism or something else, knows what it is to feel like an imposter.

[4 : 40] The Christian parent has that feeling of the imposter syndrome when they're trying to disciple their kids. They just feel like, I'm just making this up as I go along.

Like, I might be making this worse. Or the university student who has a Christian friend who's sort of drifting away from the faith and they try to challenge him in that and the conversation doesn't go all that well.

I'm just making this up as I go along. Like, I fear that I'm making things worse. Am I better not doing these things? The Christian retiree who's working out how to live as a Christian in this new phase of life has an imposter syndrome.

The Christian minister, I assure you, who's supposed to know everything and very clearly doesn't, has an imposter syndrome. And it kicks in especially when we try to do something and it doesn't go all that well.

And because of that, because we're all somewhat familiar with this idea of the imposter syndrome, I think this parable freaks us out a little bit. Because it's a confronting parable.

[5 : 52] If you are a Christian, is there anything that you desire more than to hear those words on the last day? Well done, good and faithful servant.

And yet, if you look at your life, those things that came to mind before when we were encouraged to reflect on the week that we've had before confession, my guess is there are moments in your life, perhaps very long extended moments in your life, where you wonder if that could possibly be the case.

That you will hear those words. And as we jump into Matthew 25 this evening, I think there is real encouragement for those who feel like imposters. On the lips of Jesus, these words bring with them genuine encouragement for you to think about how you as an individual, with all of your strengths and all of your weaknesses, with the experience you've got in life, and all of the baggage that you carry from life, how you as an individual can live life for the Kingdom.

And there's a warning. For those of us here tonight who know that there's no part of our life that we're investing in Jesus at all.

There's a warning. To say that you might just be missing out on what this whole life is about. There's three considerations for us that are fuel for us to live out our lives in a way that makes an impact for Christ and His Kingdom.

[7 : 34] There are three points for this evening. The Master's absence, the Master's character, and the Master's servant. And all of this will help us to be stewards of God's gifts, which is what this parable is driving at.

I hope you got it open. Let's start with point one, the Master's absence, verse 14. Again, it will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.

I just want to situate this for us in the book of Matthew. Jesus is speaking to the 12 disciples here. We know that because in chapter 24, verse 3, where this extended speech begins, we read, Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives and the disciples came to him privately.

And he's been teaching the 12 disciples as he's about to launch into the next in a series of parables. We looked at one last week. Andrew led us through that.

We've got one next week. This is in the middle. And all of these parables are pre-match pep talks from Jesus to His disciples. This is about to reach the crescendo of His earthly ministry.

[8 : 44] He's about to go to the cross where He will die and then He will rise again and then He will ascend to heaven. And from that moment, He's gone from being physically on earth with the disciples and He's preparing them for that.

In each of the parables, He emphasizes heaven and hell to lift the stakes a bit for the disciples to say that the life that you are living really matters for eternity.

For you and for others. Because Jesus is entrusting the kingdom to the 12 and by extension to us.

And so it is in our parable, again, it, the kingdom of heaven, will be like a man, Christ, going on a journey who called His servants, the 12 and by extension us, and entrusted His wealth to them.

Verse 15, to one He gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to His ability. And then He went on His journey.

[9 : 52] Think of a CEO who's about to go on extended sabbatical and he calls his cabinet to him, who he's going to entrust the 10 key portfolios of the corporation to while he's away.

And so His right-hand man, the one who he trusts deeply, he knows he's going to do a good job, he says, you're the one who's best equipped to take on most of this work. So here are five portfolios for you to manage while I'm gone.

To another, He gives a couple. And then there's a more junior employee, he wants to test him out by giving him a bit of responsibility. He says, you can take one too. And then he's going to see how it happens when he gets back.

And when Jesus was on earth, the disciples, the twelve, they were learners, they were apprentices, they were following around Jesus, they had their notebooks out, they're scribbling down notes, how did Jesus handle that situation, what did He do here, how can we learn from that, how can we be like Him?

And they don't always fill you with confidence that these are the best twelve. Peter asks some very silly questions. And probably all the twelve are thinking it, Peter's just the one who's dumb enough to ask it.

[11 : 06] But then Jesus left. And these are the twelve who are there to carry on the kingdom of heaven on earth. And Peter, well Peter turns out to be a five bags of gold guy.

Jesus says to him that he will hold the keys to the kingdom. And once the Spirit comes at Pentecost, Peter goes from bumbling fool, nervous wreck, to bold and courageous preacher.

His personality, his gifts, his leadership potential, all used powerfully for the sake of the kingdom. And when Peter was martyred a few decades later, you can imagine him being welcomed home by Christ.

Well done, good and faithful servant. Along with Peter, Matthew and John heard this parable on the lips of Jesus in that inner circle.

They wrote down scripture that we read today. We read this in Matthew's account of Jesus' life because Matthew wrote down what Jesus said and what Jesus did so that everyone would know that he is who he claimed to be.

[12 : 22] Well done, good and faithful servants. And they did all of that in the master's absence. When he had gone, they stepped up and carried on the ministry for the sake of the kingdom.

And that's how the parable plays out. Verse 16, The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work. He gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

The master's absence, the fact that the master's not there and the fact that he's coming back ought to be something that spurs us onto living for the kingdom.

Christ has entrusted gifts to you, your personality, wisdom, intelligence, love, grace.

And the task for us in the short time that we have is to steward those gifts for Jesus.

[13 : 28] That's why he's given them to us. And we steward them for a short time. It's either until we die or until Christ returns. If you've been on a long-haul flight, you would have been served by an air steward.

I say long-haul because the budget doesn't really work for this illustration. Like Ryanair stuff, I think, are incentivized to give you bad customer service. But if you've been on a long-haul flight, then this applies.

So think of that one. On a long-haul flight, the steward controls all the resources that there are on the plane for the passengers. So they are in charge of the storage space in the overhead cabins.

They are in charge of the blankets. They're in charge of meals. They're in charge of water. They're in charge of activity sets for the kids. If you're a new flight steward and you're on the plane, you can't really just say, oh look, I'm just new here.

I'm just going to sort of wait for a few hours before I get involved. Because the flight's almost over. Now nobody's expecting you to look after the first class passengers on your first flight.

[14 : 40] But you better help with the meal service, otherwise the carts are not going to get around in time. Time is short. You've got to be a steward of the resources while you can. And so we are to live with a certain urgency because we are living in the time of the Master's absence.

It's the most important thing about living in 2025. It's more important than the encroachment of AI into our lives and what that's going to do. It's more important than your particular life stage, where you're at with uni, where you're at with your career, how many years away from retirement you are, the fact that you're getting married next year.

All those things are exciting, all those things are good. But the thing that should determine how you live and what your priorities are, in August 2025, are that we are servants living in the time of the Master's absence.

Christ has put you where you are for kingdom work. And the third servant gets this wrong. Verse 18, but the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his Master's money.

That is an inexplicable response. And so, while the other servants are commended at the end of our passage, this servant is judged.

[16 : 06] Verse 28, the Master says, so take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten 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.

So, from the positive command in our parable and from the warning, be a good steward of the resources that God has entrusted to you in the short time that you have in this life.

Live for the kingdom and get wisdom from others to help you know what that might look like for you specifically. That is the main thrust of our parable and as we get to the end of that and we feel the weight of it and we've got all these things going on in our minds, I think there are a few questions that we might have if we're being honest and it's always good to be honest when you're reading the Bible.

I think we might have questions over the Master's character. Is he just a little bit harsh? And if we're honest, we're just not sure how we stack up as servants.

We just have that nagging question in the back of our mind, what if I haven't done enough? And then that goes against our knowledge that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone and so it's hard to reconcile those two things and so we get a bit confused and the risk is that we just walk away from this with the main general thrust of the parable but those lingering questions, maybe the questions we don't always find easy to ask in church, they're sort of sitting there a little bit unanswered and so we actually don't end up believing the parable with enough clarity to change anything.

[18 : 19] So let's search for clarity. Second point, the Master's character. This is where we need to start to get clarity about how we fit into these things.

Throughout the history of the church, there's always been an understanding that if we're going to understand humanity, if we're going to understand us, well we first need to understand God. John Calvin, the Reformation theologian said, it is certain that mankind never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.

If we're going to understand ourselves, we've got to get God right first. And so we start with the Master's character. The Master has entrusted his wealth to his servants and he's gone off.

Note the tone as he comes back. Look at verse 19. After a long time, the Master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five.

Master, he said, you entrusted me with five bags of gold so I have gained five more. Note the tone of the response. His Master replied, well done, good and faithful servant.

[19 : 43] You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness. There's three things, I think, about the Master's character that are worth observing in this little response.

first is that he is encouraging. The Master is encouraging. Well done, good and faithful servant. There is a delight that the Master has in the faithfulness of his servants.

These words are said at the end after he returns but I don't think there's any reason to think that they're not consistent as he gazes on, as Christ gazes on from afar on our work.

In C.S. Lewis' book, The Screwtape Letters, which is a book where there's like a senior devil who's giving advice to a junior devil on how to tempt and test Christians.

It sounds like a really weird book. I get that. But it's great. If you've read it, you'll know that. He says in there, this is like the words of the devil speaking about God. God wants them, Christians, to learn to walk and must therefore take away his hand.

[20 : 55] Right? Absence. He is pleased even with their stumbles. God delights in your obedience. That's the kind of master he is.

Second, he is wealthy. First, he's encouraging. Second, he's wealthy. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. A few things, he says, to the one who he'd entrusted five bags of gold to, five talents, more than what you would earn in a lifetime.

A few things. There is no mentality of stinginess with this master. Christ owns everything in this universe.

He cannot suffer loss. In kingdom accounting, there's no risk of losing. So invest everything. Christ invites you into the mission not because he's greedy for what you might get for him, but because he values you.

And he wants to bestow on you the weighty privilege of making an impact for eternity in his kingdom. He is encouraging.

[22 : 15] He is wealthy beyond imagination. this master. And he is generous. Come and share your master's happiness. Do you know God's happy?

It's that joy concept, this permanent state. God has eternally been a loving father, delighting in his son by his spirit.

He doesn't have good days and bad days. And he longs to welcome his servants in to share in his joy. And the path to joy in eternity and today is to be a faithful servant of the master.

Think of the most joyful Christian who you know. Like, actually think about it. Try to draw to mind someone as you think about your life that you've lived as a Christian or if you're not a Christian, the most joyful Christian you know.

I hope you've got someone specific there. I've no idea who they are, obviously, but my guess is that they serve the kingdom in sacrificial ways because that's where joy comes from.

[23 : 36] And did you notice, too, that the second servant gets an identical response to the first one? The first one, the five bags of gold guy, he did more work, made more profit. But the encouragement, the wealth, and the generosity of the master is shared word for word equally with the second servant, the one who had two bags.

Why? Because Christianity is not a bonus scheme where the highest producers get the best perks. This is not a works-based kingdom where whoever does more gets most honour.

All faithful servants who use what they have to invest in the kingdom are invited in equally because your place in the kingdom is based on Christ, not on you.

You can't be made an imposter through your investments failing. It just doesn't work that way. So that's the master's character.

What are the master's servants? And there's two considerations here. The servant who gets the master right and the servant who gets the master wrong.

[24 : 56] Because we've thought about the master now. We've thought about his character and so we can think about us. What does it look like to get, for us, if we get God right and what does it look like if we get God wrong?

Well, the mistake of the third servant is that he gets God wrong. He gets the master wrong. And as this was spoken to the twelve and the flow of the narrative of Matthew's gospel, in the next chapter we will see that Judas buries his bag of gold in the ground.

But it's true too for anyone who by their actions live life with no recognition of who Jesus is as king.

The third servant's logic is full of misjudgment. Look at verse 24. Then the man who'd received one bag of gold came. Master, he said, I knew that you were a hard man harvesting where you've not sown, gathering where you've not scattered seeds, so I was afraid and I went out and hid your gold in the ground.

See, here is what belongs to you. Now this strikes me as a little bit of a cover story by the guy who didn't really give much consideration when he just dug a hole and put it there. I think this is trying to sort of pretty over things to try and sort of reverse engineer some sort of a logic as he did, made the decision that he did.

[26 : 20] But even if this is the genuine story, well, the logic is wrong because where does this idea come from in the parable that the master is a hard man, that he's harsh in this way?

It's not what we've seen. It's not what we have known of Jesus throughout Matthew's Gospel. So, the third servant says, verse 25, I was afraid.

And his fear is what he hides behind as leading to this action. Now, there is a godly fear and a sinful fear in the Christian life. God. A godly fear draws you near to God recognising that you have no hope outside of Him.

A sinful fear causes you to distance yourself from God. And it starts to warp your picture of who God is from eternally loving trinity of three persons in perfectly joyous relationship to a harsh curmudgeonly dictator who is watching you with a disapproving gaze.

And that causes you to live in falsehood. That causes you to make foolish decisions. That causes you to live with no conception of Jesus as King.

[27 : 43] I was afraid, the third servant says, so I went out and hid your gold in the ground, see here is what belongs to you. It's a misjudgment of God's character that leads to a sinful fear that makes us people who make no investment in the kingdom.

And I think that's the best explanation of verse 29 when it says, 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.

Because what does the third servant not have? He doesn't have a right knowledge of the Master. And so he'll lose everything because the life that has been entrusted to him, the bag of gold, that's not his anyway.

There's no place for him in the kingdom if he's ignorant of the King. And so he's fired by the CEO. He's banished by the King.

But what are the servants who get God right? Well the parable tells us that what that will look like is we invest in the kingdom and its king.

[28 : 54] It's going to look different for different people. We had that phrase at the beginning of the parable that each according to his own ability the servant is entrusted with things. So we should talk with others around us as to how we as individuals can make our impact for the kingdom in the best way possible.

But one thing that the broader narrative I think hints at is that if we get the master right then our life will be characterized by extravagant devotion to Jesus as our master.

In both Mark's gospel and here in Matthew this speech on the Mount of Olives is followed by the same scene. And that scene as Jesus comes down from the mountain is that he is in a house in Bethany and he is anointed by a woman.

In Matthew we can see it starting in 26 verse 6. And this woman of questionable reputation of just about no means has one thing the jar of perfume and she breaks it to give honor to Jesus.

And there's a beautiful line in Mark's account where the disciples have been criticizing Jesus. Sorry, they've been criticizing the woman for being wasteful by anointing Jesus. And Jesus says, this is Mark 14 verse 6, leave her alone, why are you bothering her?

[30 : 24] She has done a beautiful thing. Linney adds in verse 8, she did what she could. She did what she could.

Is that not the heart of our parable? That's what Jesus expects. Do what you can. Was not that woman welcomed into eternity by Jesus saying, well done, good and faithful servant.

you did what you could. And it's the same thing that is expected of us. You may be the servant who can do very much.

Praise God. You're entrusted with many bags of gold. Go and do what you can for the kingdom. Do not let laziness distract you.

The master is absent. Time is short. Crack on. You may be the servant who can do very little. For whatever reason.

[31 : 30] Entrusted with far less bags of gold. Well, praise God, go and do what you can for the kingdom. Neither are imposters.

However, if your response to Jesus is that you've heard the good news and your life is utterly unchanged, your time, your money, your effort, your energy is all directed to yourself and what you want to do, hear Jesus' words.

You are burying your life in the sand. Repent and turn to Christ afresh. for regardless of how much or how little you have done for the kingdom as a servant, no matter how much you will do for the kingdom as a servant, none of us are the servant who has done the most.

Jesus doesn't demand anything from us that he has not done first. Because the servant who was entrusted with the most bags of gold is the one who's telling the story. And he tells this story to his disciples as he is days away from the cross, where he will pay the price for all of his servants so that he can in fact invite them into his eternal joy.

And so we might feel like imposters sometimes but when Christ is your master you are never an imposter.

[33 : 07] You are someone who has bestowed upon you the weighty responsibility and joy of living for the kingdom. So go and do likewise.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much that you give us this word to encourage us and to challenge us.

And wherever each of us is right now as an individual, we pray that you would meet us where we are and give us soft hearts that turn to you. Show us, we pray, where we can be faithful servants for that is what we long to be.

Or if we need to get our life out of the sand, would you be really kind with us as we do that and give us all the help we need to do that well.

We pray this in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen. Amen.