

Words We Long To Hear

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QUEST Series – “Making a Difference: Service”

Introduction

When growing up I guess I secretly loved praise and encouragement.

I never overtly sought it out. I wasn't really one to shout out my accomplishments. I was too reserved – too KIWI for that. But, to hear, or perhaps better still, to overhear people speaking well of us is something we all thrive on. Of course we are all different – and as NZers praise isn't something we offer or receive easily. But hearing a parent, a grandparent, or just someone we respect speaking well of us often means the world. Encouragement like that has a way of making us feel 10ft tall!

Well, as Christians there are words that we all long to hear.

When the distractions of this world – its pleasures, its sin, its busyness, its suffering, and its distractions are taken away. When our life here on earth comes to an end. When we no longer see “in a mirror dimly” but instead see face to face. When all our pretensions and masks are stripped away. We will all be brought to stand before the Sovereign God of the Universe.

At that moment, as we are bare before Him staring transfixed into His face – there will be some words that WE all long to hear –

**“Well done good and faithful servant,
enter into the joy of your master”**

This week we are continuing our series entitled “Quest”. An exploration into things that we as individuals and as Christians long for. A desire that our lives have meaning beyond ourselves and beyond the limited years that we are granted to walk this earth.

A life journey which ultimately culminates in having the Lord of all things look us in the eye and welcome us into His presence!

This morning we want to read from Matthew 25 and think a little about the idea of “service” and how we as Christians, as members of this spiritual community, are uniquely shaped, called, and designed by God Himself to **serve**.

Now serving isn't a uniquely Christian idea. Helping and doing things for others is a part of everyday life for most people. It's how families have operated for thousands of years (perhaps up until now???)

But what IS unique is the idea of serving, and being a servant, as one of the key metaphors and underlying themes of the Christian faith and the Christians life. Within Christianity the notion of service is absolutely central!

Jesus himself is cast in this role. He turned upside down the ethos of most world religions and societies, by taking the idea of being a servant and turning it into a defining narrative expressing the very heart of God Himself.

Matthew 12:18

“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight”

The image of the Son of God in John 13 humbling himself to wash the feet of his knuckleheaded disciples stands as living testimony to the upsidedown-ness of God's kingdom.

Jesus “....got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he

poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." John 13:4-5

For our lives to have ultimate significance in God's economy means coming to grips with humbling reality that our lives are not our own. We willingly give ourselves over to God as His hands and feet to the world and those around us.

C.S. Lewis once commented that the church is the only organisation that exists solely for the benefit of non-members...

Written into the DNA of the Gospel, and the church is an overwhelming passion to seek the spiritual and physical well-being of others. To give our lives in their service of God, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and all others who might cross our path that need the reality of Christ's message!

Serving is certainly not how the "world" today seeks to picture life. It's all about autonomy, being free, master of our own destiny, having others do what we want, relaxing, being on top of the heap!!!

Yet time and again the Bible reminds us that our lives can have no higher end than in the service of God and others! To humbly place others first.

1 Peter 2:16

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God."

Romans 12:10

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

What so many of us miss is that our greatest freedom is found when we give ourselves over to God and see our lives as belonging to Him alone!

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We all want our existence to mean something – to make a difference. To have an ultimate Quest which reaches beyond the vain everyday things and thinking of this earth. Well Jesus shares with his followers a remarkable insight into what it is that God is looking for in His Kingdom.....

FAITHFUL SERVANTS

Lets read together the parable of the Talents where this phrase is recorded... Matthew 25:14-30

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where

you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 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.

28 " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Q. Now has anyone here won first division in lotto?

Well hold on to your hats. Because when we read this parable we should understand that we aren't talking about the Master throwing a bit of loose change the way of his slaves before he left.

What is helpful is that the Roman currency allows us to quite easily convert things to today's money. A denarius was equivalent to a normal adult labourers daily wage. So if we take the minimum wage today of \$12.75 we get \$102.00 for a normal 8 hour day.

Now, a Talent was a measure of weight (so its value was determined more by what you were weighing!!). But here it is fairly well agreed that the weight of "money" recorded in this passage would be that of silver. This being the case a talent of silver at those times equated to roughly 6000 Denarai! If maths isn't your strong suit that equates to more than \$600,000!

But wait – the first servant is said to have received 5 of these! That's more than 3 million dollars!!! The second got around 1.2 million!!

So now its time for us to wake up a little. This isn't some trivial amount. Grasp how incredible the picture is of what the Master has

left in the hands of His simple **servants** – talk about trust!! Even the one with one Talent actually received a massive amount!

SUMMARY:

So, to place ourselves into this: This parable obviously helps us understand how we too are God's servants. Jesus has "gone away" leaving with us a huge trust. We have been given the Gospel, and any number of material, natural, and spiritual gifts in order to serve Him!

But what comes next will blow your socks off. For some this could revolutionise how you live your life as a Christian!!!

Verse 15 notes the way in which the Master determined who got what...

Each According to Ability

*~ **Our master wisely & lovingly knows us and has given to each of us exactly what is best.***

V15 says ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITY!!

There's no judgement or glory given to one over another – there is a simple recognition that all of us are not the same and all are not expected to be do the same things!

Wow – that's freeing!! In this Parable Jesus highlights that each person is designed differently. We are all part of the body but there are different members with different roles – AND THAT'S OK!!!

I want us this morning to think about this aspect. God understands and knows us intimately. We belong to Him and are to be about serving! He knows where we best fit. It doesn't matter to Him "who looks the best" He is simply concerned with us and our role in His Kingdom plans. He has a precise knowledge of where we are suited and the extent of our ability. We are freed to simply be who we are!!!

v15 tells us that after this the Master went on a journey (v19 says he was gone a long time!)

~ **The Master was away on a journey** What would the servants do knowing the Master was going away? Would they slack off, get lazy, get greedy...?

~ **First ones "went away immediately"**. Weren't mucking around, umming and aahing. They got down to the business of using all they had been graciously given and called to!!

Wow, that's what I want to be like. First time obedience!!! No questioning or debating. They weren't given an order – but they recognised the privilege and trust given them and naturally saw their responsibility to act appropriately in recognition of the Master giving them this incredible trust!

~ **Both the 1st and the 2nd servants produced proportionately!** To whom much is given much is expected. The servants in this story both doubled their money. While the dollar value would have differed the proportion didn't.

In my experience this isn't the norm in Christian circles. I don't know how many people with great abilities I see selling themselves short!! Failing to produce as they might

I look around even this room and see so much ability. People whom God has entrusted with immense natural and spiritual resources.

Q. How are you using them?

I personally know some incredibly gifted and capable people. Far more likable, talented, capable than I will ever be. But I have had to sit by and watch them waste it!! Maybe they get wowed by their seemingly impressive gifts – using them, but not for God – for themselves. Wasting the Master's treasure selfishly. Maybe they lose focus. I don't know, but God's servants are not meant to suffer from that. They are required to learn a crucial lesson...

Freedom in Faithfulness

We are so often crippled by comparison!! We look to what others do and have and long for it. But our lives are lived before an audience of only one.

No one on this earth matters – only our Master. He is the one we give an account to.

We all need to stop looking at other people – you will never be all that God desires until you take your eyes off yourself, off others, off the "if onlies" or the "WHEN this happens THEN I'll " and focus only upon the Master.

I can't believe how many Christians are hamstrung by this one. Insecurity, "low self esteem," jealousy and all these things are compounded when we lose our perspective. When we forget whose we are and what we are here for – we are God's servants and are called simply to be faithful in serving Him!!!!!!

STORY: I know a little about this comparison thing. I spent a number of years working at Kiwi Ranch. And while there I saw a lot of incredibly gifted and capable people. I remember sitting there wishing that I might be like one particular guy. He was awesome in front of a crowd, had a magnetic personality, was funny, awesome at sports, just one of those “cool guys”. It caused me to get really frustrated when I looked at myself and saw how I just didn’t measure up to what I saw. I was never going to be all those things.

BUT - It was then that God stepped in and helped change my outlook – and my life. I remember the occasion when it hit me. When God showed me that I needed to **accept who I was and how He had uniquely and specifically made me.**

**I wasn’t meant to be like anyone else!
From there a real desire grew within me to simply BE who HE wanted Jeff to BE.**

I had to shut out the expectations and comparisons I was creating and settle down to accept who I was and be faithful in that. That alone has revolutionised my life!! I am certainly NOT a particularly exceptional person – most of you will learn that soon enough! I am not incredibly gifted like so many others.

I just want to be faithful with what He has given me!!
Because I have been amazed to see that God has so often used the weak, and the outwardly less gifted, to do great things in His eyes. I have learnt to accept that I am not gifted in the same way as others are – AND THAT’S OK!!!!

When I learn to accept the ME that God has made I become FREE to serve, to live, and to be all that He intended. To use what he has given me faithfully.

Q. Are you content with who God has made you? Are you seeking to simply say: “Lord, here I am, all my faults and frailties, use me”!!

Don’t be killed by comparison!!

If there is one thing I want us to take home it is this.

Life is lived before and audience of one.

He is our Master and our time here can never be better spent than in His service – faithfully using whatever He has given you. There is Freedom in faithfulness!!!!!!!

~ ***What’s amazing is that in the end God’s response will be the same*** to those have simply been faithful to what God has entrusted to them!

To the first and 2nd servant:

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

Those words we long to hear. “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Both the servant with 5 and the servant with 2 heard the same response from the Master. It is all about proportion, not production.

We can be the greatest preacher who ever lived, the most incredible evangelist who walked the earth, the most talented singer who ever sung... the most simple cleaner of the church, the quietest person ever known, the most plain and boring human – and every single one can equally hear those simple words... “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That’s amazing!!! Forget those around you and simply be who God made you!!

Don’t be like the one who received one talent. Perhaps he did look at others around him. Maybe he thought – why did they get that much!! What about me. I’ve only got this small little amount. Why even bother! What’s the use. Who will even notice – its nothing compared to what THEY have!!

We laugh at the 3rd servant – but many times we are just like Him!!!

The tragedy is...like the servant, we bury what we have been given!! Never venturing to use that one thing that God had wisely and tenderly given to us – for a specific purpose!!!

Other times people simply use those things, given by God, for their own ends or for the “worlds” priorities. Our excuses are empty. “I’m so busy” “I’ve got kids to look after” “What can I do?” “I don’t have time”, “I’m not gifted in that way...,” “I’m just trying to survive” etc

We need our life put in perspective – what are we living for?? We aren’t called to be great – just to be faithful!! The greatest to the least in God’s Kingdom are all equal in the Masters eyes. His one requirement and joy is to have us faithfully use all that He has given us for Him! All other things that we accomplish are really nothing!

Conclusion

This Parable gives us the freedom to be who we are. To humbly ask only that God live in and through our lives (we are not called to look over the fence or even “accomplish great things”) but to simply say “Lord, you know me intimately, allow me to serve faithfully with what you have entrusted to me.”

See, God has given to each one of us individually, gifts and abilities to use, tasks and responsibilities to accomplish, time, money, and opportunity to accomplish His work. It has nothing to do with those around us. It is simply you and me by ourselves – striped bare and standing before the God of the Universe. He is calling you to be free from the comparisons and expectations you place on yourself – and to simply be faithful as one who belongs to Him, and is His loved servant.

What are you living for?

We live our lives before an audience of one.

Take some time now to thank God for who He has made you – your strengths and even weaknesses. Hand them over to Him. Ask for his help and empowering to live faithfully as part of Mt Albert Baptist Church. To find a place to serve and use all that He has so carefully given you!

We are designed to serve the Master – we are His!!

So that one day when this world is gone we will stand before Him, and with humble hearts hear those words we long for

**“Well done, good and faithful servant.
Enter into the joy of your Master”**