

I think I said last week - this part of the bible is part that some people like to ignore because it is about Judgement. And it is about the return of Jesus. And it says - we do not have forever. Jesus will return. This age will come to an end. And then all of us, will face some sort of Judgement. And Judgement means separation - for some - Reward, and for some - Punishment, and worse.

It is true of 1 Thessalonians; it is true of Matthew 25. This is not just the early church - this is Jesus saying this

The Matthew passage is interesting - because it comes as part of a longer section - we looked at some over the last few weeks - all about the return of the Son of Man - and Judgement.

Today - "It will be like ..."
 What will be like? Look at the previous sections.
 "The Kingdom of Heaven" will be like ...
 "The day of the Lord" will be like ...
 The return of the "Son of Man" will be like ...

This story says it will be like - a man going away. And he entrusts property to his servants.

Who is the man who goes away?
 The Master - the bridegroom - the Son of Man.
 Who are his servants? You and me! His people.

And he gives them some wealth to look after.

Be Trustworthy
Being responsible

Second Sunday
before Advent

1 Thessalonians 5. 1 - 11
Matthew 25. 14 - 30

How much wealth - 1 talent, 5 talents, 10 talents.

A Talent is a weight, a measure of gold.

One talent is worth 60 minas.

One mina is worth 100 drachmas.

A drachma is a day's wage for a working man.

which is £40 - £50 pounds today, or more.

So one talent is a large amount of money

20 years' wages

about $\frac{1}{4}$ Million pounds.

10 talents is $2\frac{1}{2}$ Million pounds.

These are vast amounts of money.

It might be one year's bonus for a fat cat

but 20 years', 100 years', 200 years' wages for a working man.

More than you might earn in a life-time.

It is a treasure beyond measure.

The Master entrusts a fortune to his servants
and expects them to work, and produce growth.

He speaks of harvesting where he has not sown,
gathering where he has not scattered seed.

This is not a parable about talents
in the way we use the word.

It is not about how we use the natural gifts God gave us.

It is about a treasure entrusted to the church -
that we should use to make growth -
gathering people to add to the church.

The Treasure is the Gospel of the Good News of God's love given freely to us in Jesus so that sinners may be forgiven and welcomed to feast in heaven with Jesus for ever.

The harvest, is lost souls found, sinners saved, people restored in their relationship with God through the death of Jesus on the cross.

And who are the ones entrusted with this? Who are the ones the Master will examine on his return? His servants. The Church. Us. You and me.

Maybe you don't know that God loves you. Maybe you don't know that Jesus died to save lost souls.

You ought to. You have heard it often enough.

But if you do know - how many other people have you shared that with?

I have been at meetings, even in this village, with members of other churches to plan mission.

And it has been said - "but faith is a personal thing"
"It is not something you talk about"
"Not to strangers. And certainly not to people you know"

*But Lord, I was afraid
and hid your talent in the ground.*

Jesus' answer

*Throw that worthless servant outside,
into the darkness
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Remember - Jesus is not being harsh.

He is being loving.

He is warning us in good time - this is what you should be doing.

So that we know.

It is on this sort of basis that Jesus warns of Judgement.

Now look at 1 Thessalonians 5.

*The day of the Lord will come
like a thief in the night
like the pains of labour
upon a pregnant woman.*

We do not know when it will be

but when it happens - it will be too late to stop it.

But Paul adds, 5. 4

*But you are not in darkness
so that this day should surprise you like a thief.*

He doesn't mean that we will know beforehand

but that whenever it happens, we should be ready.

Like the girls in last week's story from Matthew
with oil in their lamps ready.

You are all children of the light.

And he describes what that means.

People of the world, as opposed to the children of God's kingdom
are people of the night.

They sleep, or get drunk.

We watch, and keep sober, self-controlled.

And he describes the lifestyle of these children of the light.

Self-controlled, putting on faith, love, the hope of salvation.

He uses language very similar
to the armour of God in Ephesians 6
or the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

Whether it is the 1st Century, or the 21st
what makes a difference
what makes us ready
is that we have been walking close to Jesus
we have been allowing his Holy Spirit to work in us
and we have been changing into a godly character
because we live a godly life-style.

We have been busy about God's business
and transacting it in God's way.

Are there people we know
who need to feel God's love
and to hear the Good news of the Gospel?

If Jesus returned tonight, would it be our fault
that they have not yet had a chance to respond?

Do we postpone indefinitely the mission of the church
because we think there is no hurry?

Paul makes very clear, as clear as Jesus does,
the consequences, the difference it makes
to be a child of the light, or a child of the darkness.

They have been appointed to suffer wrath.
We have been appointed to receive salvation.

It is about Judgement again.

Some will enjoy Reward.
Some will suffer Punishment.

And he reminds us, very specifically, in verse 10
this is about Jesus.

*He died for us
so that we may live together with him.*

It is the Easter message, and the cross.
Forgiveness of sins for those who repent
and eternal life with Jesus.

We are looking forward to Christmas.
Christmas means nothing without Easter.
The birth of a Saviour is meaningless
for those who do not find salvation.

So yes we have a hope.
Yes we know love and are filled with joy.

But we are charged with investing that treasure
and gathering a harvest
or we have not served our Master.

Live lives that shine in a dark world.

Speak words that offer hope to those in despair.

Take Jesus to a world of lost souls.

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Setting the Scene

How many of us have ever been pregnant? (Not me)
Do you remember - at the end of the pregnancy -
you went into labour. Of course you do.

St Paul says - the return of Jesus - will be like labour pains.

In two ways.

While you were in labour - wracked with pain -
was it nice or nasty?
Pain is never nice! And you want it to be over.

But when it is over -
and you eventually hold your baby in your arms -
a new life - a new beginning - a new relationship of love -
is that nice or nasty?
There is nothing better!

So that is one way that J's return is like labour pains -
there will be bad times before the event
but when it has happened - it will be
a new life - a new beginning - a new relationship of love -
we will be with Jesus in heaven for ever.

So that is part of the bible teaching about the return of Jesus.
It is a good thing - the best thing ever!
But there will be difficult times before it happens
and there is no avoiding it.

What is the other way
that the return of Jesus is like labour pains before a birth?
SURPRISE!

You know it is going to happen.
You have known for months.
But you don't know exactly when.
And sometimes there are false alarms.
Is this it - oh no, not yet.
Your bag is packed, but it is not time to go.

This season - around Advent Sunday - is about that.
Jesus is going to return, he will collect us,
and take us to be with him in heaven.
That is a certainty - there is no avoiding it.

And we can be ready - we are told to be ready -
spiritual bags packed ...
but it is not yet time to go.
And we do not know when it will be.

It is like setting an alarm clock.
Not one of these modern alarm clocks
where the numbers light up and you can see the time.
It is dark - middle of the night - and you can't see the time.
You don't know if you just fell asleep -
or it is the middle of the night -
or the alarm will go off any minute.

We are "in the dark". God has set the time ...
but we don't know how soon.

That's our theme today - in the dark about when Jesus returns,
but has God given us clues about being ready?

More later //