

# JESUS: THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

## *A Service of Prayer, Thanksgiving, Worship, Teaching and Renewal*

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you  
**and also with you.**

This is the day that the Lord has made.  
**Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

We have come together in the name of Christ  
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,  
to hear and receive God's holy word,  
to pray for the needs of the world,  
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,  
that by the power of the Holy Spirit  
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

*We sit and spend a moment reflecting quietly on the week gone past, on all our concerns and anxiety and acknowledging the mistakes we have made. We bring to God too our hopes for the week ahead and our resolve to serve him and our neighbour as we ought.*

Jesus says, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.'  
So let us turn away from our sin and turn to Christ,  
confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you;  
we have done evil in your sight.  
We are sorry and repent.  
Have mercy on us according to your love.  
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.  
Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies  
cleanse you from your sins,  
and restore you in his image  
to the praise and glory of his name,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Blessed is the Lord,  
**for he has heard the voice of our prayer;**  
therefore shall our hearts dance for joy  
**and in our song will we praise our God.**

Blessed are you, Lord our God, creator and redeemer of all;  
to you be glory and praise for ever.  
From the waters of chaos you drew forth the world and in your great love fashioned us in your image.  
Now, through the deep waters of death, you have brought your people to new birth  
by raising your Son to life in triumph.  
May Christ your light ever dawn in our hearts as we offer you our sacrifice of thanks and praise.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;  
let us pray with one heart and mind.

*Silence is kept.*

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever.

**Amen.**

*We stand to hear the Gospel*

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ **Glory to you Oh Lord**  
At the end - This is the Gospel of the Lord **Praise to you Oh Christ**

---

The problem with the parable of the talents is that it doesn't seem fair. The person who started off with the least ends up with nothing at all, and the one who starts off with privileges ends up with even more.

Many of Jesus' parables turn the tables: the sinner ends up being the one justified because of his humility, God shows as much generosity to the one who worked one hour as ten hours, the younger, disobedient son gets a party thrown for him when he gets home, the one who helps the man on the road turns out to be a distrusted foreigner... but all these parables seem to advocate a radical inclusion and generosity - whereas the parable of the talents just seems a bit mean. And, indeed, it is not possible to make very much theological sense of it until we access one key thing: it's not a competition.

Human beings are intrinsically competitive. Just watch siblings playing, rivalling for attention. Just watch how people behave when ambition becomes their overriding preoccupation. Just notice how each of us, in our daily life, has a tendency to compare ourselves with others, and come up with the conclusion that we're either much better, or much worse, than they are.

Our most well loved television programmes are based on competition. What would November be like (especially this year) without Bake Off and Strictly to cheer us on our way? And yet as the weeks go on, we feel rather sad to see some of our favourites get whittled down, until finally just one victor remains. Thankfully that is not how God works. It is not a competition, and in theory, all three of the figures who are given their talents at the beginning of the story, could go away with more than they started with at the end.

But because we are so used to everything being a competition, when we read the parable of the talents we think that's a competition too. The land owner goes away, he leaves three servants in charge – and the one who makes the least money – just like on the apprentice – gets fired. He's the weakest link, so he has to go.

And I think this is a very dangerous reading of the text – because I don't think that God is actually very much like Alan Sugar or Craig Revell Hall or Paul Hollywood, and this is why...

The master gave each one of his servants a specific amount to take care of, depending, Jesus says, on their ability to be able to cope (not, please note, because of any inherent unfairness.) He's not giving them different numbers of talents because he's picking on them, or because he likes some more than others, but because he has a pretty good idea of what they can manage.

So all the servants, just like us, are given a certain amount of responsibility, and they are all expected to do their best. He expects them to do their best because he expects them to respect him and because it's the right thing to do.

As we know, two servants do the best they can, and the other puts his talent in a hole in the ground and ignores it, and he tells the landowner when he returns that it's because he was scared of failing that he did nothing with it – and the land owner doesn't buy that for one minute.

What's the point of having a talent you don't use? When gives the coin back – shiny and new to its owner, his master is obviously disappointed and says, "You might as well have lost your talent actually (and he makes the point by giving it away to one of the others). We don't know the real reason he hid it in the ground rather than even put it in a bank account. Perhaps he just couldn't be bothered – it wasn't a responsibility he wanted - perhaps there was something more interesting he wanted to do – perhaps he already had a grudge against his master and it was a sort of passive aggressive way of showing that he didn't have to do what was expected of him if he didn't want to.

I think this parable speaks of Jesus' frustration with some of the people who are dithering about whether or not to follow him, or who only want to follow him on their own terms, but I think we can see that the parable is not as scary, or unfair, as it might seem at first sight.

We might think that we are like a servant with one talent – not up to much really – but God still trusts us – still offers us life and growth – still trusts that we have potential. It doesn't matter that we don't feel very clever or gifted. If we compare ourselves with others, we can always find people who are more successful or popular or clever.

God asks us to work with what we have, whether that's one, ten or a hundred talents. He asks us to think: "What can I do with the gifts God has given me? What is he calling me to? What am I good at that I can use to further the Kingdom of God? What do I possess that I can offer him to use as he sees fit?" The problem with the servant with one talent in the story wasn't that he only had one talent – it was that he didn't engage with it at all - he acted as if his talent didn't even exist.

And, Jesus is saying (the Christian faith is an effort - living life well takes determination and persistence. As we have often said, following Jesus does not make all your problems go away, but it offers hope, and meaning, and encouragement to live a good life and make the most of the gifts you have for the good of the world.

Jesus says to those who follow him, "I am going to die for this. Some of you will die too. Others will be ridiculed or persecuted, disbelieved and thought to be entirely foolish. This is a costly way of life, but if you live it, you will find your true selves, you will discover talents you never knew you had."

We have more talents than we realise. I suspect that we can do more good than we realise. God has given you gifts. He has noticed the work you have done for him. And he promises that the more you live your life for him, the more you will receive.

The servant with one talent asks, "Why should I? I don't suppose I will be appreciated? Why didn't he give me more talents to start with?"

The other servants say, "Here I am Lord", and they are rewarded for their love and faithfulness.

### **Song**

There's a wideness in God's mercy, Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in His justice, Which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in Heaven;  
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader Than the measures of our mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal Is most wonderfully kind.  
But we make His love too narrow by false limits of our own;  
And we magnify His strictness with a zeal He will not own.

There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.  
There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations in that upper home of bliss.

If our love were but more simple, we should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would be all gladness in the joy of Christ our Lord.

## **Prayers**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gifts you have given to us and the callings that you lay upon us. Give us the strength to sustain us all as we try to live our lives in the light of your love. Help us to be all that we could be, and to trust our future to you. Lord hear our prayer

We pray for those with many talents and much responsibilities - for the leaders of the nations, and for leaders of businesses and charities. We pray for the leaders of different Church denominations in our land, and across the world. Give them the courage to speak truth and love into all situations. Lord hear our prayer

We give thanks for those who have gifts and training that enable them to heal and protect. For all medics, carers, scientists and researchers, giving thanks for the great strides that are being made in vaccines at the moment. Lord hear our prayer

We pray for our own community, giving thanks for all those who use their talents to make it a better place, either in their employment or in a voluntary capacity. We pray for our Churches - help us even in this time of closure, to serve our neighbour as you have called us to do. Lord hear our prayer

We pray for all those who suffer in body, mind and spirit - especially those who we know who are in hospital, waiting for hospital appointments, or convalescing at home. We pray for all residents of our care homes, and all who are struggling to manage at home. Help them to trust in your faithfulness, and your presence with them in times of darkness, and by your loving will, bring them light and comfort.

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,  
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

The peace of God which passes all understanding,  
Keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God  
And of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,  
And the blessing God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Be among you and remain with you always  
Amen

Go in the peace of Christ  
**Thanks be to God.**