

# OpenTheo

## March 21st: Exodus 28 & Matthew 25:1-30

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Priestly garments. The parable of the virgins and the parable of the talents.

Some passages referenced:

Isaiah 61:10-11 (priestly garments and the bridegroom); Numbers 27:21, 1 Samuel 14:41 (Urim and Thummim).

Exodus 27:20-21 (lamps and oil); 1 Samuel 3:1-3 (lamp, eyes of judgment, and light of revelation); Zechariah 4 (oil, anointing, and light-bearing); Acts 2:3, Revelation 1:12-13, 20 (Church lit as a lampstand); Proverbs 9 (Folly versus Wisdom); Luke 19:11-27 (Luke's version of the parable); Matthew 24:45 (the faithful and wise servant).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Exodus 28 Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests. Aaron and Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamah. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

You shall speak to all the skillful whom I have filled with the spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. These are the garments that they shall make, a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checkerwork, a turban and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests.

They shall receive gold, blue, and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and of fine twined linen, skilfully worked. It shall have two shoulder pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together.

And the skilfully woven band on it shall be made like it, and be of one piece with it, of gold, blue, and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. You shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel.

You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree, and you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance. You shall make settings of gold filigree and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords, and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings.

You shall make a breastplate of judgment in skilled work. In the style of the ephod you shall make it, of gold, blue, and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen shall you make it. It shall be square and doubled, as span its length and as span its breadth.

You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row, and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond, and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst, and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold filigree.

There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. You shall make for the breastplate twisted chains like cords of pure gold, and you shall make for the breastplate two rings of gold, and but the two rings on the two edges of the breast-piece.

And you shall put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edge of the breast-piece. The two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings of filigree, and so attach it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod. You shall make two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breast-piece, on its inside edge next to the ephod.

And you shall make two rings of gold and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod at its seam above the skilfully woven band of the ephod. And they shall bind the breast-piece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, so that it may lie on the skilfully woven band of the ephod, so that the breast-piece shall not come loose from the ephod. So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breast-piece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord.

And in the breast-piece of judgment you shall put the urim and the thamim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly. You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue.

It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a garment, so that it may not tear. On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, around its hem with bells of gold between them, a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, around the hem of the robe. And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he does not die.

You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, Holy to the Lord. And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban.

It shall be on Aaron's forehead. And Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.

You shall weave the coat and checkerwork of fine linen. And you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework. For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps.

You shall make them for glory and beauty. And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh.

They shall reach from the hips to the thighs. And they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.

Exodus chapter 28 concerns the clothing for the priests, most particularly the high priest.

These are the things that surround the priest, and the priest's glorious garments correspond with the tabernacle as we will see. There's holy garments for a holy house.

And the garments of the high priest are like a tent in many respects. The connection between the person and the house should be recognised. I've already observed the way that the construction of the different parts of the tabernacle correspond with the days of creation.

And here we'd see events corresponding with the fifth day. The fifth day also corresponding with the second day. The second day concerned the structure of the tabernacle itself.

And now we have the priests and their dress that corresponds with the tabernacle. It is this clothing that enables them, as it were, to fly across the face of the firmament. To be like the angels who enter into the realm of the Lord in his heavens.

The construction of these garments was entrusted in people who had been filled with a spirit of skill. The gifts of the spirit for the forming of the house. It's worth noting here, and later on in the discussion of the formation of the tabernacle, that the spirit is deeply involved in equipping people to create this realm.

The spirit is the one who creates this using people that he has filled with his gifts. To understand the garments of the high priest it might be helpful to step back a bit and to think about the purpose of garments more generally. Garments can be extensions and surroundings of us.

They glorify us. They can represent authority and standing and status. When someone takes on a new office there is a process of investiture.

They put on new garments, robes of office, maybe a particular chain. Or there is a coronation in which they take the crown upon themselves. They also cover nakedness.

Nakedness can be connected with shame. It can also be connected with immaturity in childhood. An infant is naked because they haven't yet achieved glory.

But nakedness can also be seen in terms of guilt and a loss of integrity. We fear nakedness because it represents exposure to judgment, to the gaze of some other party. Clothing then covers that nakedness.

It protects us from the gaze of judgment of other parties. But it also gives us glory. It's a way in which we express, for instance, our individuality or a way in which we express a particular office that we hold or function that we're performing.

Aaron is wearing the world. There's vegetation, you can think about the linen. There's animal, the wool.

There's precious metal, there's precious stones. And then there are expensive dyes and all these different things are part of what he's wearing. And human beings are distinguished from the animals, among other things, in the fact that we wear clothes.

We dress ourselves with the world. And to actually be naked is to be peeled, to lose something of the covering that is natural to us. It's natural for human beings to wear clothes.

Every culture you go to, pretty much, human beings wear clothes. That can change from culture to culture. There are different standards of dress and different fashions from time to time.

But we all wear clothes. It's something that's a virtual human universal. Aaron's garments represent the tribes, among other things.

He stands for Israel. He is dressed in a symbolic manner. The purpose of his garments are in part for covering nakedness.

We see that in places like verse 42. But they're also given for glory and beauty. It's natural for a human being, when they grow up, to want to wear garments that are glorious.

Garments that express something of their status, their individuality, that distinguish them from others in one way or another. The clothing of the high priest has many different connotations that we can think of, too. It's like military dress.

A lot of it is metallic and heavy. It's a sort of chain mail at certain points. A weaving involving gold.

As the weft, perhaps you have gold, and then you have the warp as some other sort of precious thread. It is a garment that serves a purpose as he goes into the presence of the Lord. The high priest memorialises Israel before the Lord and is also marked out with a special thing that represents his status.

The blossom on his forehead that represents him as the high priest is holy to the Lord. The high priest that stands for Israel in part as a kingdom of priests. The garments are also nuptial.

In Isaiah 61, verse 10 and 11, we see something of this particular connection. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation.

He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress. And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to

sprout up, so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations. The connection then between the clothes of the bridegroom and the clothes of the priest should be noted here. And the headdress of the priest seems to be connected in part with the headdress of a bridegroom.

The priest represent the divine bridegroom to the bride. The priest is perhaps best understood as a sort of palace servant. Now a palace servant or minister within the palace is someone who represents the king to his guests.

The authority of the king. He is one who acts in the name of the king. But he is one who is under the king.

As one who has to serve the guests in certain ways. And so on the one hand he represents the king to those that come into the house. But on the other hand he serves those who come into the house on behalf of the king.

And here he represents the divine bridegroom to the bride, serving the bride in the name of and as a symbol of the divine bridegroom. The garments of the high priest are also like a tabernacle around him. They are made using similar materials to the tabernacle.

And we can see some more specific correspondences. The ephod for instance could be compared to the holy place. It goes from the waistband to the shoulder.

And much of its significance seems to be related to what it carries. To the onyx stones and also to the breast piece that is placed upon it. We have a number of references to ephods in scripture.

And they seem to have some sort of cultic purpose. Often associated with some sort of judgment or divining. And in places seem to have an idolatrous purpose.

Here the importance may be particularly the relationship between the ephod and what it carries upon it. The breast piece. The onyx stones are engraved with the names of Israel and the different tribes of Israel.

It's a memorial to the Lord. It brings the people of Israel to God's mind as it were. Calling him to act on their behalf.

To act recognising that they are his people. On the other hand if they are sinful it brings them to mind in a more negative way. Think of the way we have memorials.

So someone who wears a wedding ring. That can be a memorial of their spouse. It's something that brings their spouse to mind.

And the bond that they have with their spouse. And so the breast piece and the onyx stones have that sort of memorial purpose within the structure of the high priest garments. The breast piece is attached to these things.

It doesn't seem to be supported by those but it is attached to them. And the ephod maybe was some sort of waistcoat type thing. And then there are the two onyx stones on the shoulder.

And then there's this connected plate that lies over the chest of the high priest. And that plate or that breast piece has precious names and stones again. More of them.

And the square shape of it suggests maybe a relationship with the holy of holies. There's a movement also in glory. The holy of holies is connected with gold.

And here the breast piece is a golden object with precious stones on it. And once again it serves a memorial purpose. It is also the place where the urim and the thamim are held.

Those are stones of judgement and it seems that they were consulted as a means of consulting God. In Numbers chapter 27 verse 21 we see one example of this. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest who shall inquire for him by the judgement of the urim before the Lord.

At his word they shall go out and at his word they shall come in. Both he and all the people of Israel with him. The whole congregation.

And then in 1 Samuel chapter 14 verse 41. Therefore Saul said, O Lord God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord God of Israel, give urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give thamim.

And Jonathan and Saul were taken but the people escaped. From this sort of verse it seems that the urim and the thamim served a purpose akin to taking lots. They were sacred lot taking and it was a means of determining a decision between two binary choices.

And so one of the stones would be connected with one decision and the other with the other. The robe of the ephod could be connected with the curtains of the tabernacle. Once again we're seeing similarities in the sort of construction, the sort of materials that are used.

And it has bells and pomegranates at the bottom. The pomegranates represent presumably fertility and blessing in that sense. And maybe some of the nuptial themes connected with this as a bridegroom's dress.

A dress that represents the divine bridegroom to the people. And so the high priest symbolises the divine bridegroom with the pomegranates. The bells have to be there in order that he can go into the presence of God.

And the high priest moves with the sound of these bells. In verse 35 it is necessary that he should not die. Maybe it's the musical sound of worship that they represent.

He comes in with this tinkling of bells that represents the music with which God should be approached. Now it's worth pausing for a moment here and considering the way that a lot of this garment seems to be designed to protect the high priest. He's coming into a dangerous realm.

He's coming into the realm of God's presence. And if he does not come with the right memorials, if he does not come covered up in his nakedness and if he does not come with the proper sound, then he will die. He will be judged.

It's a dangerous realm. It's God's presence. It's the realm of the king.

And if he is not welcomed, then he's in trouble. On the forehead of the high priest there is a golden plate or a blossom that's placed. This is again engraved like a seal, like the breastplate and the onyx stones.

And the fact that these three objects are all engraved in that same sort of way suggests that there's a connection between them. The breast piece is connected with the Holy of Holies. It has that square shape.

It's something that is made with the most precious materials. Here we have another gold thing that represents the budding or the blossom of the high priest. And we can think of that in terms of Aaron's rod that blossoms.

It's the same sort of word that's used and it's a token of his authority, of his particular standing as the representative of Israel. So we have the onyx stones, we have the breast piece and then we also have the blossom. And all of these have a particular significance that maybe attaches them with the Holy of Holies.

In discussing the blossom or the plate on the forehead, we are told that Aaron is to bear guilt for the people in the holy things. So both the tabernacle and the high priest's garments have some sort of atoning purpose or connection with the process of atonement. And here we should reflect upon the importance of the Day of Atonement when the high priest has to divest himself of his glorious garments, go through the process of atonement and then put on those garments once more.

The other priests have garments of lesser holiness. They cover their nakedness so that they do not die. The high priest wears eight garments, an ephod, breastplate, robe, turban, frontlet or this little plate or blossom and then a tunic, sash and undergarments.

The regular priest wears some version of four of these, has a coat, sashes, cap or some sort of headdress and then linen undergarments. And so there are similarities between them that connect the two of them but make very clear that the high priest has a higher level of glory, a glory that's associated with the holy of holies, not just the holy place. And there's an elevation of the garments from Aaron's body.



They move out from his body, from that inner level of the linen undergarments out until you have the most glorious elements of the garments representing the holy of holies. One thing this might alert us to is the connection between the tabernacle and the human body. The tabernacle is a sort of body and those sorts of connections with the body are even more clearly seen in the case of the temple where there are elements of the temple that correspond to all different parts of the body.

There are five tables on either side of the holy place with five lampstands on each, thinking about the two hands on the two hands and then there are five fingers that correspond with those different elements there. In the holy of holies there is hidden the tablets of the law which relates to the way we must hide the law of God in our hearts. There's the presence of God particularly found in that realm.

The heart of the human being is the place where God's presence should be found and then we have things like the two trunks of the pillars of Yaqan and Boaz connected with the legs of the human being. The altar that may relate to the earth that lies beneath us and the way that the bronze sea is like the reproductive organs of the human body that give life and from which life can flow. Incense might be related to the function of the nose.

The lamps to the function of seeing. And all these different elements suggest that there is some correspondence between the tabernacle and the temple and the body. And when in the New Testament we're told that we are a living temple that Christ's body is the temple, this is not coming out of the blue.

This is something that should be understood from the logic of the Old Testament itself. And one of the things that we are seeing in the clothing of the high priest is a marking out of the body of the high priest according to the logic of the tabernacle. And so the logic of the tabernacle is written onto the body of the high priest.

Now it's important to think about the way that the whole sacrificial system works and the way the tabernacle works. It works according to a sort of analogical system where things are mapped onto each other symbolically and there are all these different layers of connections. It's a more poetic system than we're used to.

We're used to things that are more prosaic rather than analogical and poetic. But this is actually how the system of Scripture works. It works with a sort of concrete logic where human beings can be mapped onto animals, onto particular types of plants, where clothing can represent something of a building and a building can represent a mountain or can represent heaven.

And all these sorts of connections help us to see the way that the universe is all connected. And these connections are connections within which divine meaning can be found and lives can be lived in tune with a deeper reality. So our task when thinking

through these passages is to observe these connections, to see the different analogies and correspondences that are at work and then having understood the basic logic of the system to understand how that logic can become the framework within which meaningful communication occurs.

So this is all just the framework, like the different words that you might have in a dictionary or the different structures of a grammar and then you actually form sentences with these things. And those sentences can be found particularly in the practice of the sacrificial system. And so when we get to the Book of Leviticus, we'll see that logic of the sacrificial system working within the language and the grammatical structure of the tabernacle structure and the dress and the priestly structure and the way that that relates to animals and all these other things.

A question to consider. Where in the New Testament do we see allusions, perhaps, to the clothing of the high priest? And what further light might these references shed upon the meaning of these things within the Old Testament itself? Matthew 25 verses 1-30 But at midnight there was a cry, Here is the bridegroom, come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

And the foolish said to the wise, Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves. And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered, Truly I say to you, I do not know you. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

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. Then he went away.

He who had 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 had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, Master, you delivered to me five talents. Here, I have made five talents more.

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. And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, Master, you delivered to me two talents. Here, I have made two talents more.

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. 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 and gathering where you scattered no seed. So I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.

Here, you have what is yours. But his master answered him, You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have 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. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew chapter 25 contains three great judgement scenes. The first one is the parable of the ten virgins. Why virgins? Well, maybe because this is a marital event.

The bridegroom is coming. He's going to return for his bride. And the virgins would be associated with the bride.

They would be the sort of bridesmaid. And here I think they symbolise those associated with the bride of Jerusalem. And the five and five pattern continues the one taken and another left pattern that immediately precedes it.

It underlines the binary division that Matthew often draws our attention to. Why are there ten of them? Perhaps we could think of it in terms of the ten lampstands of Solomon's temple. There's five on the right, there's five on the left.

And the virgins represent the bridal character of the people which is represented by the temple itself. They bear their lamps out to meet the bridegroom as a sort of unveiling of the bridal glory within the temple. It's a presentation of that glory to the bridegroom who's arrived.

It might be connected also with the previous parable of the wise and faithful servant.

Which might be the faithful high priest who has to act within the house of his master. And there's a cry at midnight and there's a shut door.

That reminds us of Passover. It's the event where God delivers his people in the middle of the night and there's this terrible judgement upon those who are not faithful. And those who are left outside of the door suffer a terrible fate whereas those within the house who are safe are blessed.

We should also have in mind Exodus chapter 27 verses 20 to 21. Keeping oil for the lamps was the continual duty of the Israelites. And it was like the fourth day associated with the heavenly lights but paralleled with the first day when the lampstand itself was fashioned.

The lamp going out was associated with loss of vision, prophetic and the eyes of judgement. And we've seen this in 1 Samuel chapter 3 verses 1 to 3. That parallelism between the eyes of the high priest, the light of the word of the Lord being heard and then also the lamp in the temple. Oil is light bearing liquid.

It's associated with anointing which is associated in turn with light bearing in places like Zechariah chapter 4. And elsewhere in scripture we see oil associated with the spirit who produces faith in us which prepares the people of God to bear God's light. We might also think about the contrast between the characters that's drawn here. We should pay attention to the adjectives that are used.

It's faithful and wise versus wicked. Wise versus foolish. Faithful versus wicked and slothful.

Each description accents something different about the aspects of character that we should be attending to. It's not just good and bad. It's wise and foolish.

It's people who are prepared, people who are ready and people who are not. People who have gotten the resources that they need in the time for the judgement and those who are taken by surprise and unawares and unprepared. The foolish versus wise opposition should also be explored deeper.

We can see that in places like Proverbs chapter 9 with the contrast between the woman folly and lady wisdom. Here we can also maybe think back to the wise and foolish builders in the Sermon on the Mount. And the way that many of the same themes come up there.

The way that they will be inspected. I never knew you for those who say Lord, Lord we did all these things in your name and yet they are workers of wickedness. Here being prepared for Christ requires faithfulness, diligence, vigilance but also wisdom.

The wise person sees what lies ahead and makes provision and preparation for it. And

this is one of the things that the disciples of Christ are challenged to do by this parable. They do not know what time the Lord will return in judgement upon them.

And so they must be prepared at all times. They must be ready to leave at a moment. And that will be a matter of keeping their lamps prepared.

Tending the lamp of the spirit within them. This could be connected to the life of the church more directly by recognising that Christians are lamps. And the church is a lamp stand.

This is one of the significances of the tongues of flame at Pentecost. And the vision that we see in Revelation chapter 1. We have been anointed with the oil of the spirit and set alight by that spirit. With tongues of flame we are burning as a candlestick, as a lamp stand, as individual lamps within the temple of God.

And it's important that we tend to the life of the spirit within us. We do not quench the Holy Spirit. We seek to tend the flame of the spirit by regularly returning to the replenishing oil of the word and the sacraments.

The next parable is a story of a man who departs for a long journey. And he entrusts a great deal of his property to his servants. Talent should not be presumed to mean talents in the sense that we often use that term.

We often think of talents in terms of our skills and abilities. And it's not unrelated to that. But that's not what the term means here.

It's a large sum of money. And it's to be used for trade. They seem to be given these gifts of talents on the basis of their ability.

The more competent and able, the more will be entrusted to their hands. And God-given responsibilities and opportunities for service are important. And we must make the most of these.

That's one of the points of this parable. The importance is to be found ready for judgment. The time of testing will reveal the work of people.

This is something that's discussed on various occasions within the New Testament. Where we see that people who are unfaithful find that their work in the day of testing is destroyed. And things for which they may have been responsible fall to other more able and responsible and faithful parties.

Those who are faithful share in the joy of their master. And we should remember a talent is an immense sum of money. Two talents might be an entire lifetime's wages for a regular worker.

A modern equivalent would be something maybe two or three million dollars. This man is

leaving an immense treasure in the hands of his servants. And expecting them to have something to show for it at the other end.

He's expecting them to prove themselves faithful and diligent and capable of using his resources well. Luke's parable is different. It's a story of a returning king.

The king leaves these great treasures with people and then goes off for a long journey. Where he defeats people who were not willing to be reigned over by him. And then he returns having gained the kingdom and then gives these gifts to his faithful servants.

Luke also has an equal distribution at the beginning but very different results from their trading. Matthew has different distribution at the outset. When the man in Matthew's parable returns it's after a long time.

For some this suggests that this parable relates not to AD 70 but to the end of all things. I'm not sure that's the case though. The extra responsibility seems to be within this world.

And the long time could relate to the 40 years. 40 years can be a very long time to live through. Especially when you might be spending almost the entirety of your life waiting for this thing to be fulfilled.

Here we might see parallels between the faithful servants and the faithful and wise servant of chapter 24 verse 45. The unfaithful servant, the final servant however, is lazy and indolent. He doesn't think that there's anything personally that he has to gain from acting as a faithful steward of his master's wealth.

He ventures nothing. He is merely concerned not to lose what has been entrusted to him. And importantly his behaviour was based upon a particular perception of his master.

He sees his master as a hard man. A man who is more concerned with judgement, not a generous master. A master who wants to get whatever he can.

A master who is concerned with condemnation. A master who is concerned with penny-pinching and all these sorts of things. A miserly master.

While the faithful servants ventured and took risks on the basis of a belief in their master that he was someone who was a good master who would entrust responsibility to those who were faithful. The unfaithful servant, on account of his false perception of his master, did not venture anything. He did not put the money to use as a faithful steward and so it's taken from him and given to someone who will make use of it.

The wealth entrusted to the sterile service of the unfaithful servant is handed over to the most fruitful and faithful servant. And the language of final judgement occurs here again.

As God judges in history I think we should also see that related to final judgement.

Judgements in such things as the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the ways that individuals could be caught up in these things relate not just to historical events but also to eternal destinies. The historical judgement is as it were bringing forward an anticipation of that greater judgement that awaits us. And being alert for these specific judgements in history prepares us for that final judgement at the very end.

In the same way as being prepared for our death prepares us for a greater death that belongs beyond that. A question to consider. The unfaithful servant in the parable of the talents seems to have a religion merely concerned with preserving what he has rather than doing anything with what has been entrusted to him.

It's also related to a vision of his master, a vision of God. How might we fill out this portrait of the unfaithful servant and how might we avoid following his example?