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*Reflection 1 Learning to live as God wants -  
Introduction to the Gospel reading*

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In Churches across Scotland today, readings focus on how we, here and now, might live for Jesus as we wait for Him to come back in glory. It is hard today to live in light of Jesus' return – someday. Thorough Paul's letter to the church at Thessaloniki, there is a constant thread – encourage one another – a theme that has, I hope, been a constant in my preaching.

There is a constant need to be on our guard, making sure that as we wait for Jesus to come back, we live as He wants. Paul expects God's people to stand out from others rather than think and behave in much the same way as anyone else. If we live to please God rather than just doing whatever we want, we are less likely to find ourselves surprised when Jesus comes back.

The parable of the "Talents" in Matthew 25: 14-20 is the 5<sup>th</sup> of the stories that Jesus told to help us be ready to meet Christ in glory face to face. It is too easy with the old translations to read the word *talent* and take it to apply to natural skills or abilities. But the meaning is far wider than this. The key word is "*faithful*" (Matthew 25:31,23) God has given us a whole range of gifts, abilities, opportunities, resources, time and much else. The important thing is that what we do with them. If we are faithful with all that God has given us, and use all these things for him, rather than for ourselves, we will receive His thanks and congratulations. Do nothing with what He has given us and we will find ourselves with nothing.

Part of getting it right will be to pray with Moses in Psalm 90:12 that we might have right view of our lives and have the wisdom to live as God wants. Not just using things for ourselves but using them for others and for God.

**The hidden God** Yet another parable involving an absentee owner

. Often, much of the time, it seems that God also has gone away  
& left us to get on with it, almost as if He doesn't care; but His non-interference is  
necessary for our liberty and He is only hidden;  
.. and only hidden because we don't know how or where to look.  
Although there may be no supernatural signs, no proofs, no voices,  
.. the Lord is closer than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.

**The challenge**

.. The "talents" in Jesus' story were not innate gifts or skills.  
.. These servants were given money – thousands of pounds belonging to their master,  
... to do with what they could on His behalf.  
The given amounts were disproportionate,  
.... as human abilities, circumstances & personalities differ.

Such a responsibility proved too much for one slave;  
afraid of the risk involved, he played it safe –  
hide it, plank it in the ground, burial was said to be the best security against theft.  
At the return and the accounting,  
he then tried to excuse his own inept behaviour by shifting the blame on to the owner;  
.. trying to protect himself, he lost everything:  
.. whoever who would save their life will lose it.  
His master was not as grasping as he said  
... but proved most generous to His faithful servants.

**Stewardship:**

The parable defines Christian stewardship,  
... our stewardship of the earth, & of the Church,  
.. our stewardship of ourselves and all we think belong to us.  
... For everything belongs to God,  
who trusts us to make good use of all the resources  
.... of His love which He puts at our disposal.  
Don't clutch such treasure faithlessly,  
afraid of risking it or of investing in other people;  
and don't blame God for your failures or your fear.

Watching for Christ is not passive – fearful inactivity – a hiding away under the bed  
clothes until morning comes but positive action (including praying) & active responsible  
serving; and the reward is the opportunity for more service.