

8th November 2021

Accountable

“What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose interests do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable? How do we get rid of you?”

Tony Benn MP, The Independent Mind, a lecture in Nottingham in 1993

I get a regular alert in my inbox highlighting every contribution my MP has made in the Westminster Parliament – written or verbal questions, contributions to debates and votes taken – through an organisation called: *They Work For You* (<https://www.theyworkforyou.com>). It helps me keep tabs on my MP and open up dialogue. It deals with at least *one* of Tony Benn’s questions – how to keep my Member of Parliament accountable.

There are too many instances – in commerce, with governments, through international deals, with charities, in Church scandals, in cover-ups – when there’s a clear lack of accountability. Even when structures are in place to hold people to account, ways have been found to bypass scrutiny and avoid detection. Tony Benn was right. Accountability matters.

We know things break down when people of influence aren’t held to account by appropriate structures and regulations. But let’s remember that accountability is not just about pointing the finger at people “out there”, but is something that needs to be examined in our own lives. Jesus told a story of three employees given responsibilities while their boss is absent. (Matthew 25:14-30.) The different levels of responsibility are called “talents” – one has five, a second has three and a third has one. When the boss gets back, the one at level five has done well. The level-three worker has done OK too. And the third? Zippo! The basic level of responsibly has been left unused. Nothing productive has resulted.

Lessons? Yes, there’s the valid criticism of the worker who did nothing useful with responsibilities given. But for me, the message is that each of them was *equally held accountable* and had to answer for what they’d achieved. Never mind pointing the finger at someone *else*. “Where is the accountability for what *you’ve* been given?” Jesus is asking.

Are you happy to be accountable today? Whatever responsibilities you have, basic or complicated, can you look at what you’ve done and know that, wherever accountability comes from, you have done well?

A prayer for today

I know I have to be accountable. I’ve done my best, I think. I hope that will do. Amen