

## **Luke 19:11-27**

### **Stewardship**

We know that Jesus often spoke in parables. When He did so, He usually took His illustrations from things about which His listeners were familiar. He spoke of things like mustard seeds and sheep, of lost coins and rebellious sons. It was easy for those to whom He was speaking to follow along and to relate to the main point of the story. That was one of His marks as a great teacher.

This particular parable was no exception. The people in Jericho and the surrounding countryside had experience with the scenario described in the story. At the time of Christ, there was no one living who could remember a time before Roman rule. The Roman Republic, and then the Roman Empire that followed the accession of Octavian, had chosen to allow selected local rulers to maintain authority if they proved themselves able to keep the peace and ensure the collection of revenues due the Roman government. This allowed Rome to focus on frontier areas not yet subjugated, and saved them the expense of subduing foreign peoples.

The oldest among those alive at the time of Christ remembered the rule of Herod. When he died (4 BC) his kingdom was divided among his three sons, Archelaus receiving the lands of Judea. His oppressing rule led to increased unpopularity and periodic local revolts. Frustrated, Rome chose to remove him from power and delegate the management of Judea to several local governors, one of who was Pontius Pilate, who ruled at the time of Jesus. Often, these rulers would return to Rome on some important issue, and they expected things to go well in their absence. When they returned, they would reward those who had done well and punish those who did not.

### **Setting**

Luke began his narrative with the transition, “while they were listening to these things” (v. 11). It is reasonable to ask, “what things?” Luke was referring to the teaching of Jesus that had concluded so nobly in Luke 19:10, “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Clearly this was not the entirety of the conversation Jesus had with Zacchaeus and the others who were in his home, but this peroration was certainly the most memorable.

Luke mentioned that the immediate motive for this particular parable was “because He was near Jerusalem” (v. 11). Perhaps Jesus had left the home of Zacchaeus as He continued to talk with those around Him. But whether or not they had actually begun their long trek up the hill toward the city, or were still in Jericho waiting to begin, is unimportant. The power of Jerusalem was in the expectation of the crowds as Jesus approached the city. As Luke explained, “they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (v. 11).

This misconception regarding Jesus had been an issue throughout His entire earthly ministry. Even before His first public appearance, beginning with the stories of the events surrounding His birth, “all who heard them kept them in mind, saying, ‘what then will this child turn out to be?’ For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him” (Luke 1:66). The miracles He performed only increased the anticipation of the people. At times, the urge of the masses was such that it reached a critical mass and threatened to erupt

into revolution. Jesus was not unaware of this. He knew “that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, [so He] withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone” (John 6:15).

Despite His occasional withdrawal to allow passions to dissipate, and despite His frequent teaching on the subject, this distorted vision of Jesus’ role as the Messiah Who would drive out the Roman usurpers and reestablish Jerusalem as the center of the world prevailed. The Jewish people refused to be dissuaded from their belief that Jesus had been anointed to establish an earthly kingdom. Even, perhaps especially, His own disciples were notorious for failing to perceive the truth,

“<sup>35</sup>James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.’ <sup>36</sup>And He said to them, ‘what do you want Me to do for you?’ <sup>37</sup>They said to Him, ‘grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory’” (Mark 10:35-37).

So embedded was this belief in His disciples, that even after Jesus had been crucified and risen again, they asked “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

At this point in the biblical narrative, we have come near the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The cross was only weeks away. And, as Jesus neared the holy city of Jerusalem, the intensity of the crowd’s anticipation had grown. It was soon to be Passover, one of the high Jewish holy days. This celebration served as the annual reminder of Israel’s deliverance from captivity in Egypt. What a propitious time to free Israel from the captivity of Rome!

The crowds had gathered from hundreds of miles around. The city had filled beyond capacity. The timing was perfect. Even the verbiage used by Luke, “was going to appear immediately” (v. 11), suggested the image of an event slowly appearing on the horizon and arising into full view. In the minds of many of the people, the overthrow of Rome and restoration of the kingdom of Israel loomed large and unmistakable. It was as part of His continued efforts to prepare the people for the kind of Messiah He was, not the kind they expected Him to be, that Jesus told this parable.

The story, itself, was simple. A nobleman travelled to a distant land to receive an inheritance. While he was away, he left resources in the hands of his slaves and charged them to be diligent until he returned. When he did so, he rewarded those who had been faithful, rebuked and disciplined those who had not, and punished those who resisted his rule in his absence.

Scholars have pointed out some similarities between the narrative recorded in Luke, and another parable told by Jesus that is recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. In both stories there was a main character who went on a long journey. In each story he left an amount of money with his slaves with the expectation that they would put it to good use. When he returned, he held them accountable for their actions in his absence, and in each story two of the slaves were rewarded while one was punished.

This is not the case, however, of the two writers recording the same event at different points in their own accounts. The setting is different, for example Luke has Jesus telling this parable in Jericho while, in Matthew’s account, Jesus tells the parable in Jerusalem. Also, in Luke’s account, Jesus tells the parable

to the crowds, whereas in Matthew Jesus speaks only to His disciples. Also, many of the significant details of the parable itself are different. In Luke's account of the parable, the main figure is a nobleman; in Matthew's he is a businessman. In Luke's account there are ten slaves; in Matthew's there are three. In Luke's account each servant is given one mina, in Matthew's they are given different amounts of money; in Luke's account the rewards are different for each slave, in Matthew's the rewards are the same. Though the meaning of the two parables are similar, and Jesus obviously had the prerogative to modify His storytelling to suit the immediate needs of the moment, this is a different event than that recorded in Matthew.

### **Trust**

Jesus began His story, “<sup>12</sup>a nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. <sup>13</sup>And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘do business with this until I come back’” (v. 12-13). Those attentive in the crowd perhaps thought of Archelaus, who had returned to Rome to confirm his inheritance when his father, Herod, had died. But this parable was not a recounting of history. Jesus was, Himself, the nobleman.

Jesus knew what lay ahead. Jesus was going to glory after the suffering and sacrifice of the cross. His reward (the kingdom of the parable) would be to be placed at the right hand of God the Father and to receive rule over all things, “<sup>20</sup>He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And He put all things in subjection under His feet” (Ephesians 1:20-23). And then one day, He would return. His point in this parable was not to talk about the hated family of Herod the Great, but to help His followers understand that He was not establishing the kingdom of God at this time. That would come later, perhaps much later, and their responsibility, was to be good stewards of their responsibilities until Jesus returned.

In the time of Jesus, a *mina* was worth about 100 *drachmas*. This was approximately four months wages for an average daily worker, assuming no work on the Sabbath. This was a significant amount, but really the value of the money is not the point. This parable was not specific to those who have been given much or little. The focus was not on what believers have been given, but rather what they do with it.

Jesus inserted into the story at this point the reminder that, “his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘we do not want this man to reign over us’” (v. 14). In the parable, the nobleman's subjects hated him. Though the disciples did not yet see it, so too, it was with Jesus,

“<sup>22</sup>The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief corner stone.

<sup>23</sup>This is the Lord's doing;

It is marvelous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:22-23).

Like the nobleman, Jesus had done nothing for which His subjects should hate Him. Prophecy about His own death Jesus asserted “they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘they hated Me without a cause’” (John 15:25). Yet, though some hated Jesus, the people were His citizens still. Jesus created the world and it is ultimately His dominion. Jesus was explaining to His disciples that

though there were those who did not want to submit to Jesus, one day the kingdom of God would be established, and He would rule forever.

The consequence for those who did not submit was made clear. At the end of the parable, the nobleman said “these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence” (v. 27). The word used by Luke is emphatic. It means “to slaughter.” There will be no mercy for those who have chosen to reject the King when the kingdom is established,

“<sup>11</sup>And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. . . . <sup>20</sup>And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. <sup>21</sup>And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh” (Revelation 19:11, 20-21).

When the nobleman left, he had expectations. Expectations for obedience from all. Expectations for stewardship of His chosen followers. So, too did Jesus.

### **Accountability**

As Jesus continued the parable the nobleman, having traveled to a distant land to receive his inheritance, returned and “he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done” (v. 15). He wanted to see what had happened in his absence. He had left his slaves in charge of significant resources, and he wanted to know what they had done with them.

Some of his slaves had done well, “<sup>16</sup>the first appeared, saying, ‘master, your mina has made ten minas more.’ <sup>17</sup>And he said to him, ‘well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’ <sup>18</sup>The second came, saying, ‘your mina, master, has made five minas.’ <sup>19</sup>And he said to him also, ‘and you are to be over five cities’” (v. 16-19).

We need not make too much of the difference between these two slaves. Both did well with what they were given. These two slaves had been good stewards. They had used what their master had left them to increase his wealth. As a consequence, their master gave them great influence in his kingdom. They had shown themselves responsible, in a “little thing,” now they would have the opportunity to prove themselves good stewards on an even larger scale. Notice, also, the attitude of both of these slaves. They took no credit for what they had done. They said “your mina” to show a recognition of their master as the source of the increased wealth. After all, they had only invested what they had been given. They were slaves; it was not their own money to begin with.

Let us pause to reflect that we must recognize God as the source of all good things (even our talents) and reflect proper humility when referring to our successes in furthering His kingdom. If we have a beautiful singing voice, that years of practice and training has allowed us to perfect, we must remember that it was God Who gave us that voice to begin with, as well as the preservation from disease to keep that voice

strong. Do we have the talent for mechanical things and the ability to serve the kingdom by labor in the buildings of the church, let us appreciate that our skills and strength come from God, Who expects us to use wisely what He has given us. Any number of other examples can apply, for each and every believer has a spiritual gift from God for the good of the body of Christ. And each is expected to use that gift to the utmost.

Scripture makes clear, both in this parable and in other places, that when Christ returns, all of His servants will be held accountable for what they have done with the opportunities they have been given, “<sup>13</sup>each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. <sup>14</sup>If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

There are, I think, two points to consider. First, we do not know when Christ will return. Jesus may come at any time. He may come within the hour, or He may not return until the next millennium. That is God’s business. As believers, though, we must always be on the alert and be prepared for His return. As Jesus taught in a previous parable, “blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them” (Luke 12:37). When Jesus does return, or when we go to Him, we must be prepared to be held accountable.

Second, we have been given so much, that we will be held to a higher standard than any generation in history. To be sure, there have been generations of believers who have suffered persecution for their faith. That is true, but in terms of the resources and opportunities available, no generation has had the access to Scripture, freedom of worship, and abundance of tools as we have. It has never been easier to spread the gospel message, and we will be held accountable to a standard that reflects that abundance.

### **Consequences**

Finally, “<sup>20</sup>another came, saying, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; <sup>21</sup>for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow’” (v. 20-21). Luke did not use the word *allos* which means “another of a similar kind,” but rather he used *heteros* which means “another of a different kind.” We derive the word heterodox from this Greek root. This slave was not motivated by love for his master or investment in the kingdom, but rather he was driven by fear. He had no genuine relationship with his master. Notice that he even tried to blame his master for his own lack of judgment. He had no genuine repentance for his lack of vision, and instead he tried to paint his master in the worst possible light by suggesting that his master was a thief.

The nobleman was unconvinced, and “<sup>22</sup>he said to him, ‘by your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? <sup>23</sup>Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?’” (v. 22-23). The third slave represented a believer in name only. Jesus would

never call a true child of His a “worthless slave.” The point, here, is that we must do something we what we are given.

Looking around the crowd that had gathered, the nobleman concluded his rebuke. He <sup>24</sup>said to the bystanders, ‘take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ <sup>25</sup>And they said to him, ‘Master, he has ten minas already.’ <sup>26</sup>I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away” (v. 24-26). The worthless slave was stripped of any pretence or privilege and position. He represented those who make a profession of faith but have no relationship with Christ. But, it is important to consider that Jesus was not declaring a punishment, but a simple truth. Those who are faithful will be rewarded; those who are not will be punished.

Jesus had taught this before,

<sup>16</sup>Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. <sup>17</sup>For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. <sup>18</sup>So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.” (Luke 8:16-18).

<sup>23</sup>And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. <sup>24</sup>For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it” (Luke 9:23-24).

<sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup>And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:22-23).

### **Takeaways**

Each of us who is a child of God has been given resources for furthering His kingdom. Until He returns, we are commanded to use them to the utmost for His glory and our sanctification. When Christ returns, or when we go to Him, He will reward His faithful slaves out of the abundance of His lavish, undiminished grace.