

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message Jesus Explains the Future

Scripture Psalm 2; Luke 19:11-27

We are approaching the Easter season. At the beginning of chapter 19, Jesus was in Jericho. He was ready to embark on His final journey into Jerusalem before His arrest and crucifixion. Within one week He would die on the cross. A number of His followers accompanied Him on His journey, including the twelve apostles. He had some important information about the future to share with His disciples, and, as was often His custom, He taught with a parable.

Read Luke 19:11-27

Let me explain the context for this chapter. It was an unusual time in Israel. Passover week was approaching and thousands of pilgrims were making their way into the city of Jerusalem. There was an unusual tension associated with the Passover Festival — an ominous sense of danger. Everyone was talking and arguing about the miracles of Jesus. The people were aware that the religious and political leaders were opposed to Jesus. The leaders resented the fact that so many people were following Him. They didn't agree with His claims to be the Messiah; they perceived Him as a threat to their traditions; and they were afraid that Jesus would cause a revolution with His teaching about the kingdom of God.

Under the best of circumstances, the relationship between the Jews and their Roman oppressors was a delicate matter, and the Jewish authorities were afraid that Jesus, with His large group of followers, would attract the attention of the Romans and bring on the nation of Israel more heavy-handed restraints.

Among the people, there was a lot of support for Jesus. His miracles and activities during His three years of ministry had persuaded thousands of individuals that He was destined to usher in the long-awaited kingdom of God, and that, in fact, He was about to inaugurate the kingdom. This had a different meaning to the Jews of that time than it does to us. At that time, everyone thought of the Messiah as a political and military leader. They assumed that He would establish Himself as an earthly king and then use His power to overthrow the enemies of Israel, which were, primarily, the Romans. Many of the people were convinced that Jesus was to be this king, and this is why they would, in a couple more days, welcome Him into the city with shouts of “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.”

There were very few individuals who adequately understood the situation. Everyone had an opinion, but only a few had listened carefully to what Jesus had said about Himself and His kingdom. At this point in time, Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom for more than three years. For example, in Luke 17, (*verses 20-21*,) the disciples had heard Him say, “The kingdom of God does not come with careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God was a spiritual kingdom, not a physical or political kingdom.

In Luke 18, (*verses 16-17*,) Jesus explained that people had to accept and enter the kingdom like little children because “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” From His previous teaching, the people should have understood that there was going to be no display of power or force. Jesus certainly didn’t mean that He was going to fight the Romans with an army of children!

Also in Luke 18, (*verses 24-25*,) Jesus said that it was difficult for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom because earthly riches and influence had no value in the God’s kingdom. On previous occasions, Jesus taught that people had to be “born again” before they could even see the kingdom of God.

Several times Jesus had explained why He was going to Jerusalem. He had said to His disciples, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. On the third day he will rise again” (*Luke 18:31-33*). Even though the disciples heard these statements, they did not understand what He was talking about.

All of this information is background to the parable in Luke 19. As verse 11 states, Jesus told this parable for two reasons: First, He was near to Jerusalem (It was only 17 miles between Jericho and Jerusalem.), and second, the people thought that the kingdom of God was to appear imminently.

This parable is a summary of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God. The parable clarified the position of Jesus in regard to the future, portrayed the rejection of Jesus and confirmed His eventual return to earth, made it clear that there would not be a Jewish political triumph over enemies, and taught the disciples about their responsibilities in the time between His departure and His return. There is quite a lot of important information in the parable.

The parable concerns a "man of noble birth" who left his own country in order to receive his appointment as king. Jesus was, of course, talking about Himself. He was preparing His followers for His going away. We know from Scripture that He earned the right to His kingdom authority by His death on the cross. The proof of His right to kingship was revealed on earth by His resurrection and by His ascension into heaven. Scripture states that the Father "raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (*Ephesians 1:20-21*).

Scripture describes the celebration when Jesus received His kingship in heaven, the far country. The heavens resounded with praises. All the creatures of heaven sang, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals (of judgment) because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." (*Revelation 5:9-10*).

In the parable, there were two kinds of people — those who were citizens and those who were servants of the nobleman. In the Roman empire, a citizen was a free person. He had special privileges and prestige that ordinary people did not have. A citizen was a member of the ruling class of society. He was in a position to make decisions which affected the lives of all other people.

The opposite of the citizen was the servant or slave. These people had no freedoms; no individual rights. They were the property of others. Their purpose in life was to work for their masters. Obviously, the best kind of servant was the one who obeyed his master without any reservations, who put the Master ahead of his own interests.

The parable is about the attitudes of these two groups of people. The attitudes of the citizens became obvious as soon as the nobleman began his journey. They sent their representatives after him to say that they did not want to have that man to reign over them. The point here is not that they were unwilling to have a king; they didn't want that particular man to be their king.

This is an example of the hatred people can have for Christ. If we suppose that Jesus was only talking about the people of 2000 years ago, then we will miss the point. The fact is that the majority of the human race is willing to give allegiance to anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ. The second Psalm describes how the people and the "kings of the earth take their stand against the LORD and against his anointed One." They wanted to "break the chains" and "throw off the fetters" which bound them to the LORD (*Psalm 2:1-3*). In other words, they did not want God or the nobleman who was His representative to have authority over them.

The attitude of the citizens did not change the situation at all because the nobleman did receive His authority and eventually returned as King. The people of earth had no influence over the actions of the sovereign God. In spite of the wishes and efforts of kings and rulers and nations to oppose the ways of God, His choice of King was installed in the place of authority. Psalm 2 indicates that "The One enthroned in heaven" laughs at the efforts of earthlings to change His purposes.

Psalm 2 also states that the rulers and peoples of the earth have an important lesson to learn: they must either serve the LORD with fear and respect, and bow before him in allegiance, or else they will be judged and eternally banished from the presence of God. According to verse 27 in the passage in Luke, this is what will happen to those who hate the Lord. He will call them into His presence and order their execution.

Now we must back up and take another look at this parable. The most relevant teaching, the teaching that applies to us, is not about the wicked citizens, but about those who were servants of the King. I hope the idea of being a slave to Jesus Christ does not offend you because the Christian life won't mean very much unless we have this opinion of ourselves.

Believers have been redeemed, which means they have been purchased from the marketplace of sin. As believers, we do not belong to ourselves. We are the property of Jesus Christ. The purchase price was the bloody death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary. We belong to Him, and as our Master, He has the right of complete and total authority over us, our privileges, actions, ambitions, and even our thoughts.

Every master expected his slaves to live for his benefit. Therefore, if we are going to be the kind of slaves who please our Master, Jesus Christ, then our attitudes toward time, other people, and our work, must be extraordinarily generous, sacrificial, whole-hearted, cooperative; not at all like non-believers.

The servants in this parable were given gifts, or resources, and commanded to use them for the profit of their Master. The word in the Greek language meant that they were to “trade” and “occupy,” to “make the most of the situation.” The word in Greek is “pragmateia.” The servants were to be pragmatic, practical, realistic, sensible, reasonable about their use of the resources.

The King distributed His resources among His servants. He anticipated positive results from the use of His resources. There was a day of accountability when He returned. The King called all the servants together and wanted to know how much profit each servant had gained. It was not a question of whether there would be a profit or not because every gracious gift of our heavenly King is capable of producing good results. His gifts will not return void if they are put to use. The point was simply how much profit would be given back.

This is a picture of the Christian life. Scripture makes it clear that God gives each believer at least one spiritual gift to be used for His benefit. During this present age, until the King returns to earth, He wants His servants to be busy working for Him, using what He has given to us for His benefit and glory.

In this parable, there were two kinds of servants. Some were faithful, and they were rewarded for their efforts. Yet there was one servant who made no use of his gift. He had wrapped it up in a cloth so that no one knew he had it. He had hidden it away so it wasn't useful at all.

He had an excuse for his lack of activity — he knew that the King “took out what He did not put in, and reaped what He didn’t sow” (*verse 21*). His knowledge was correct, but his actions proved that he did not have any desire to obey, no sense of responsibility, no feeling of obligation. He was unwilling to do anything that would benefit his Master. He knew the facts, but this did not motivate him to do what he should have done. Not even his fear of the Master was a motivation. He wasn’t a good slave at all.

Unfortunately, this is the pattern of too many believers. If all of us put our spiritual gifts to work in a sincere way, there would be lots of spiritual fruit, lots of kingdom profit. Our work is to sow the good news of the kingdom of God, to use the spiritual gifts we have been given, and to present the harvest to Jesus.

The bad servant didn’t live in expectation of the return of the King. Do we? Which kind of servant represents us? If we truly understand what Jesus has done for us, and that we are indebted to Him for our eternal salvation, then we, as present day slaves of Jesus Christ, should be looking forward to seeing Him, and we will be ready to give an account of our lives to Him. For most of us, our lives should be different than they are now.

Instead of receiving a reward, one servant lost everything. At the end of the parable Jesus said something very important. He said, “To everyone who has, more will be given. But as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away” (*verse 26*). That statement should be familiar to us by now because it shows up in several places in Luke. For examples, at the end of the parable of the soils (*Luke 8:18*) and again in the episode at the house of Jairus (*see message on Luke 8:51-56*), Jesus said that people who have faith will see the results of faith, and this will be encouragement to exercise more faith, which will be the basis for gaining yet more faith. It’s a wonderful cycle when it works, and it works by faith. Jesus also declared that people who have no faith to begin with, and who are skeptical about the authority and abilities of Jesus, will never have the opportunity to experience God’s authority and power.

Previously Jesus applied this statement to faith, but in Luke 19 He applied it to the use of spiritual gifts. The point is that believers must use their spiritual resources or lose them. “Use it or lose it” applies to both muscles and spiritual gifts. The ultimate application concerns the grace of God. God has showered us with His grace and love and gifts. Believers must respond to and live by the grace of God if they are to be members in good standing in God’s kingdom.

This teaching was part of the last minute instructions given to the disciples. It is part of the important instructions that Jesus has for us.

Some thoughts for reflection:

Every believer has a spiritual gift.

That gift is to be used to advance the kingdom of God.

Every believer will have to give an account for how the gift is used.

Faithfulness in earthly matters will be rewarded with heavenly privileges.