

March 12, 2023

WHAT DO WE DO WHILE WE WAIT?

Luke 19:11-27

(5 of 16 in a series through Luke 16-24)

In Luke 9:51 we read, “When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Now, it may not feel like it to us as we’ve been following the Lord’s teaching and ministry over these last ten chapters, but we’ve been following Jesus on a journey. From 9:51 on Jesus has been headed toward Jerusalem. The next time we look at Luke’s gospel (in a couple of weeks), we’ll see him arrive as we look at his triumphal entry in Luke 19:28. And so in our text today, Jesus is almost there. He’s about to arrive in Jerusalem.

But something happens as he gets closer and closer. It becomes clear that the expectations of his disciples are rising. I don’t know if this is because Jesus hears the conversations that are taking place among them as they are on the journey or if it’s because Jesus simply knows their thoughts. But whatever the mechanism at work, Jesus knows that those following him are starting to have visions of what might happen when they reach Jerusalem.

Now, we can understand why they might be excited. The Old Testament promised the day when God would bring his Messiah through David’s line, and he would reign as king, defeat his enemies, save his people, and set up a glorious reign that would last forever. It would be like paradise restored. And the disciples understand that Jesus is the Messiah. That’s what Peter had confessed when Jesus asked who do they say that he is, and Peter had answered, “You are the Christ of God” (9:20). And the idea that the Messiah would establish this promised reign in Jerusalem has a lot of precedent in Old Testament teaching (e.g., Isaiah 27). Therefore, the disciples begin to envision Jesus coming into Jerusalem, declaring that he is king, leading a revolt against the Romans where he overthrows them, and establishes a kingdom on earth where all his people dwell under him in a glorious paradise. Therefore, just before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus tells them a parable in order to correct some misconceptions they have. Luke explicitly tells us that this is the purpose of the parable we’ll look at this morning as he writes in verse 11, “As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.”

Therefore, what we’re going to look at this morning is a parable meant to correct the disciples’ misconception that Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem meant the Lord was immediately going to reign in glory like we know he will when he returns. But don’t think that the lessons from this parable are simply helpful in teaching those who heard him in the first century. The reality is that Jesus brings out much in this parable that every follower of Jesus needs to understand as we wait for his return. As clearly as any place in Scripture Jesus tells us in this parable that there are some expectations placed on Jesus’ followers during this time when we live and await his coming.

So what I want to do this morning is walk through this parable and draw out some insights and lessons for us. Some might be obvious and points we already fully recognize. Some might be

points we've not considered. And others will no doubt be points that we understand but have let drift from the forefront of our minds and have not allowed to impact how we live. So my hope today is that we might be reminded of some truths, learn something we simply didn't know, and find ourselves jarred into living a more purposeful life if we're drifted from that. What then does this parable teach us? First, Jesus teaches us that there is a time between Christ's resurrection and his return.

There is a time between Christ's resurrection and his return

This is an obvious point because we're living in this time. Jesus rose from the dead about 2,000 years ago, and he hasn't returned yet. So, saying there's a time between Jesus' resurrection and his return is about as obvious as me telling all of you who can see me that I'm tall and thin. This isn't breaking news. But it is something that the disciples didn't quite understand, it is something the parable teaches, and it is necessary for us to recognize in order to make sense of the points that will come from here.

Again, remember that Jesus tells this parable because his disciples thought that Jesus was about to show his glorious reign immediately when he got to Jerusalem, and he's correcting their understanding. We read in verse 12, "He said therefore, 'A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.'"

Now, that probably doesn't make sense to us as we first hear it because the language of receiving a kingdom is weird, and we don't have precedent for this as we don't live in a monarchy. But the idea is actually quite simple. To receive a kingdom simply means being granted the right to reign as king. This actually happened with Herod the Great, as he went to Rome in order to be granted the right to reign over Israel as their king. Even more interesting was what happened with his son, Archelaus. When it came time for Archelaus to reign over Israel, he went to the Caesar to be granted the right to reign as king, but the Jews sent a delegation of fifty men to oppose him, and so Augustus made a compromise, giving Archelaus a lesser title than king, putting him on a sort of probation to see if he might earn the right to become king—which he never did.¹

So, with all this imagery in his audience's mind, Jesus tells a parable about a nobleman who goes away to a far country to see if he might be granted the right to reign so that he might come back and reign as king. Again, the idea is clear, and in case it's missed on us, the nobleman in the story represents Jesus. This doesn't mean that every detail fits perfectly. Jesus didn't go into heaven to receive authority to reign. He actually told us in Matthew 28:18 that it was at his resurrection that he'd been given all authority in heaven and on earth to reign as king (as the *God-man*; he of course has eternally had all authority as God the Son). But he did ascend back to his Father's right hand, and we're awaiting the day when he will return, and when he returns it will be to reign as our forever king. And so, we're in the time between his resurrection and his

¹ Darrell Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1525-26.

second coming, awaiting his return. This brings us to our second point: in this time, we're expected to live faithfully.

In this time, we're expected to live faithfully

Jesus tells us in verse 13 that before the nobleman left, he called his servants to himself and gave them some tasks to do while he was away. We read: "Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'" By saying that he gives ten of his servants ten minas, Jesus probably means that each of the servants gets one mina. And a mina was about four months' wages. So the nobleman expected each of his servants to use the mina he gave them to make some more money. The idea seemingly being that they're servants of a nobleman now, but when he returns as king, they'll be the faithful servants of the one who reign and can gain greater responsibilities for themselves.

Now, the temptation here for us might be to read a similar parable in Matthew 25 into this one. You may remember the parable of the talents, but this one is a bit different. In that story, the man who went away was a businessman who gave three servants various talents (a talent is worth about 60 minas) and then returned. I think they're two entirely different parables that have some overlapping themes. But back to this parable.

After giving his servants the minas, we're also told one other detail in verse 14. Jesus says, "but his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" Now, based on the story I've noted about Archelaus, this would have made complete sense to Jesus' hearers. They had done this very thing to Archelaus, sending a delegation to say to Rome, "We don't want this man to reign over us." So, in our parable, the servants are given minas to be faithful, and they're surrounded by neighbors who hate this noblemen and don't want him to reign over them.

Now, let's pause and apply this to us. Those servants in the parable represent us. All of us who profess to be servants of Christ Jesus have been given all kinds of gifts, talents, and abilities by our Lord, and we're expected to faithfully employ them in service to him while he is away. Another way to say that is that you and I have been given responsibilities by Jesus that we are to be busy fulfilling while we wait for his return as our king. Moreover, because we live in a place where many oppose our king, we're expected to carry out our faithful responsibilities to our king—Jesus—in a hostile environment, surrounded by those who don't want Jesus to be king over them.

So, it's worth asking, is this how you think of your life? Do you see yourself as a servant of Christ, awaiting the return of our king—which could be any time—having been given responsibilities by him in this time so that we might prove ourselves faithful to him in the tasks he's given us? My guess is that this isn't our default thinking.

My guess is that our default thinking is to think of this life as if it's ours. We ask, "What do I want to do; whom do I want to marry; how do I want to spend my time and money; where do I want

to live?” and so on and so forth. But those are fundamentally the wrong questions to ask. Rather, we should say, “I belong to Christ. I am his servant, and he is my king. He’s given me responsibilities as I await his return. Therefore, what can I do that will demonstrate faithful service to him?”

We ask that with regard to our career, whom we marry, how we spend our time and our money, where we live, etc. Actually we can say it better. How do we want to spend *his* time and *his* money that he has given us to manage in his absence, just as the nobleman gave the minas to the ten servants? That’s how you and I—and all who profess to be followers of Jesus—are to think and live our lives. We’re servants, given responsibilities by our king in his absence, awaiting his return. And because he’s given us a mission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Christ commands, we should be asking, “How am I using my life and resources to ensure that this task is obeyed?” In this time, we’re expected to live faithfully as servants of Christ. And that leads to our third point: at Christ’s return, we’ll give an account to him.

At Christ’s return, we’ll give an account to him

Now, I’m not going to spend too much time here because it’s hard to talk too much about this point without getting into the fourth point, but the parable does remind us that when the king returns, we’ll give an account to him. We see this pictured in verse 15 as Jesus continues the parable saying, “When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business.” That is, they were called to give an account, and the point is that we will be called to give an account to our Lord as well for how we’ve faithfully handled the responsibilities that he’s give us in his absence.

The Scripture speaks this way in other places. For example, Hebrews 13:17 tells pastors that we “will have to give an account” to the Lord for how we’ve overseen those put under our care. Paul says to the Roman believers in Romans 14:12, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.” And, though we could point to others, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” And the fact that he mentions good that we’ve done here suggests that he doesn’t mean this pertains simply to unbelievers. You and I will stand and give an account to Christ. Yes, as believers we don’t have to have fear of standing before Christ and being condemned. There is no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1), and John tells us that one who believes “does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24). So, again, we do not have to fear a judgment of condemnation. Our eternal verdict has already been declared when we repented and believed. We’ve been declared righteous by faith in our crucified and risen Lord. But we will stand before Christ and give an account for how we have handled the responsibilities given to us as his servants in this life—just as we see the king calling the servants to give an account on his return in verse 15. And this brings us to our final point: those who are faithful will be rewarded and those who aren’t will be judged.

Those who are faithful will be rewarded and those who aren't will be judged

It's hard to separate these realities of judgment and reward in the parable because they're intertwined, so we'll wade through the parable, seeing these realities in pieces, and then we'll try to put them together. As the newly crowned king returns and calls for his servants to give an account to him as to what they'd gained by doing business with the mina he'd given them, we see his interactions with three servants—who serve as representatives for all ten. We read of his interaction with the first two of these servants in verses 16-19. Jesus says, “The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’”

These servants had each taken their mina and made a 1,000% and 500% increase, respectively. They'd done well with their responsibilities, and they were rewarded generously. As faithful servants of the nobleman before he became king, now that he's king, one gets to rule over ten cities and the other five. This is a glorious reward for their faithfulness to the king.

Similarly, in Revelation 11 we see a scene where Christ is returning, we hear the announcement, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (v. 15). And then the elders fell on their faces, worshiping God, and one of the things they say is, “The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and *for rewarding your servants*, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great” (v. 18). Christ will return as king and reward his servants for our faithfulness. This is why we saw Jesus say a few chapters back that we should handle his money that he's put in our care in such a way that we will be rewarded with money that is ours in his kingdom (Luke 16). The king will reward his servants at his coming.

But he'll also judge those who do not belong to him. Jesus continues, “Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ He said to him, ‘I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ And they said to him, ‘Lord, eh has ten minas!’ ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me’” (vv. 20-27).

If we start at the end, the Lord will judge those who do not belong to him. Remember that contingent that didn't want the nobleman to reign over them? Well, they were playing a dangerous game. If they failed to keep him from becoming king—which they obviously did in the

parable—then you’re making known to the new king that you oppose him. And that’s not a good place to be. So he slaughters them.

This is reflective of Christ’s judgment against all who do not belong to him. Again, the Bible pulls no punches here. Those who do not belong to Christ will face the merciless judgment of the Lamb. That’s why we are constantly calling all unbelievers to repent and trust in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus so that they might be reconciled to the reigning and coming king.

But notice that those who do not belong to Christ will also show up among the servants. That third servant simply hid away the mina and bore no fruit of being a faithful servant. Therefore, he is called a wicked servant in verse 22. He doesn’t know his master. He’s like those who say, “I don’t want to serve the God of the Bible because I see scenes of judgment, and he is too severe.” Well, we might say, isn’t that a reason to repent before judgment. Indeed, he is severe toward his enemies, so you should repent. But it also is true that such people expose that they really don’t know the Lord. In the parable, the third servant clearly didn’t know the king. All he thought was that he was a harsh and severe man, but look how gracious he’s been to the first two servants. They were faithful with a little bit he gave them, and he’s blessed them to reign over entire cities. What’s more, his generosity just keeps coming. The mina that is taken away from the third servant is given to the one who already has so much. And the other servants are amazed, but this just shows the Lord’s generosity. We will be overwhelmed at the grace he will show us—as we should be at the grace he’s shown us already.

So, the servant clearly didn’t know the king. And so there will be many Jesus tells us who on the day of judgment will claim they knew him. They may be members of churches. Jesus tells us many will say, “Lord, Lord,” arguing with him that they indeed knew him and did works in his name, and he’ll simply declare that he never knew them and that they are bound for the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. So, it’s good to ensure that we are bearing the fruit of loving God and neighbor—and, chiefly, the fruit of repenting in the face of our sin.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord will come back. And during this time, he’s given us the task to be faithful with what he’s left us to do. On his return, he’ll evaluate our faithfulness to him, even blessing us generously with rewards that are beyond our expectations. But he’ll judge those who do not know him. So let us make sure this morning that we know him and that we’re walking in faithful obedience to our Lord. If we’re not, may we use this moment as an opportunity to repent as we come to the table. Amen.