

Until the King Returns

January 26th, 2014

Luke 19:11-27

"¹¹As 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. ¹²He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ¹⁴But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'"

I was walking through ShopRite with Michelle on Thursday morning and as walked past the magazine rack, there was a special issue of Life Magazine, with a big picture of Jesus' face and the words, Jesus: Who do you say that I am? And it was especially stunning to me because I had been reflecting on these verses in Luke 19, where Jesus says some things that are so over-the-top that you'd expect that anyone today who talked like this would be institutionalized.

What that tells me is that Jesus Christ must be a very important Person. No one on earth has seen Him in 2,000 years. When He was here, He was nowhere in the vicinity of southern New Jersey. Yet there was His "picture", all these years later and all these miles away, declaring loudly that there is something extraordinary about this Man, and we would therefore be very wise to listen to Him carefully when He speaks. He is not a Person who ought to be trifled with. A Man who says the sort of things that He says here, and is still being talked and written about and worshiped all these years later, is Someone amazing!

And in this text, He communicates that He has enemies and He has allies. He is not here, but He will be back, and when He returns, all will give an account to Him. Some will be slaughtered, some will be exposed as frauds and shamefully disgraced, and some will be lavishly rewarded and praised. And everyone who hears me is in one of these three categories. And this can't just be dismissed, because He's real; that's why, 2,000 years later, He's still on magazine covers! So I hope you'll listen carefully to Jesus today.

Jesus is King

"¹¹As 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. ¹²He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return."

Luke's introduction helps us to see that Jesus is preparing the disciples for His departure, that is, His ascension. They had come to know Jesus was the King, the Christ (Messiah). They'd seen Him display His majesty over nature, the spiritual world, disease and death. So they are eager to see Jesus exercise His authority over Rome, and set the world right and reestablish God's loving, wise, righteous rule over the whole creation. And Jesus is telling them, "It's not going to go down like that." At least, not yet.

They couldn't figure this out, but we know why, right? The Kingdom of God is a rule of blessing, life, joy, peace and freedom. But not if you're an enemy of God. For rebels against God's throne, the restoration of His rule in all the earth means judgment and defeat. But Jesus is going to Jerusalem because in His great love and mercy, the Judge has come not to bring judgment, but to be judged in the place of God's enemies. Though He has done no wrong, He willingly bears the agony of the cross, suffering punishment in the place of His people, so enemies of God might be cleansed of sin and transformed into beloved citizens of the Kingdom, and children of the King!

After dying in the place of His people, Jesus rises triumphant from death, explains this all to His awestruck disciples (24:41) over the span of forty days, and then ascends to heaven, journeying to that far country to receive for Himself the Kingdom:

"²⁰[God] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come,"
(Ephesians 1:20ff)

This is what Jesus is talking about when He speaks of going away to a far country. He is going to suffer and rise and ascend and send the Spirit to His people, that we, His beloved servants, might engage in His business until He returns, when He wraps up history by judging all humanity and undoing all that is wrong and broken in the world.

Engaging in the King's Business

This brings us to what I think is the main point of the parable: while the King is away, He has business for His servants to be engaged in:

"¹³Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas (1 mina = 3 months wages, each servant is given one), and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'"

If you've trusted in Jesus – if you've received His pardon from sin, reconciled to God as your heavenly Father, adopted into His family as a co-heir with Christ – then you have become a servant of Jesus. You are not just saved *from* something (judgment, wrath, hell, bondage to sin), but saved *for* something (being restored/renewed into His image, to engage in the good works He has prepared for us). He did not just die to punch you a ticket to heaven, but that your life might now be lived for His glory and praise (2 Corinthians 5:15). That means you do with all your might what He has given you to do, i.e., you engage in business until He comes.

What do you think it means to be engaged in the King's business while He is away?

I don't think we need to speculate about this; all we need to do is go to the place where Jesus ascends, and see what He tells His disciples to be engaged in:

"⁴⁶Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as

Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven."

What Jesus has called us to be engaged in is the task of making disciples through gospel proclamation and demonstration (cf. Acts 1:8), teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. It's seeing your whole life, your wallet and your houses and your cars and your jobs and your leisure aren't for you anymore, they're for Him. It means embracing that you live where you live, work where you work, play where you play, know who you know, for the sake of the Kingdom of God. It's stewarding your time, talents and treasure that you've been entrusted for His glory and fame, by pressing into a family of believers devoted to the mission of being discipled and making disciples.

Yes, I know, you're busy and this sounds like it's going to be a lot of work. Jesus actually says here that He expects you to be busy while He's away. That's not bad. But what are you busy with? You're busy with Kingdom work; but is it His Kingdom, or yours? You don't have to give account to me, but you will give account to Him (v.15).

Three Ways of Responding

Now, I said that there is depicted in this passage three potential ways in which people will respond to this. So let's look briefly at this.

Response #1: Enemies of Jesus

The first response to King Jesus is to simply reject Him. ¹⁴"But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" An enemy of Jesus is someone who does not want Jesus to reign over them. It is not about being a moral person or an immoral person. You can be very kind and moral and generous, but be doing those things simply because they make *you* happy, and that is still rebellion. Sin is fundamentally not a list of immoral activities, it is a heart of self-rule.

If that's you, please notice two things in this text. 1. Even if you don't want Jesus reigning over you, He *does* reign over you: "But **His** citizens..." In evangelism we often say, "Make Jesus Lord of your life," but we don't really invite people to make Jesus their King; we herald the good news that Jesus *is* King, and that He has decreed amnesty to all who will repent and embrace this good news by faith. But whether you receive Him as King or not, He is your King. You can shake your fist at Him all you want, or act like He does not exist. You may hate Him, but He owns you. You live in His world, you breathe His air, and you will give an account to Him when He returns.

In awesome mercy and patience, He has left this earth and delayed in returning, that you might have time to repent (2 Peter 3:9). But, 2. His patience will expire, and His righteous judgment will follow: ²⁷"But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.' ²⁸" Oh, He is a good King! He loved you unto death, that you might receive eternal life. You exist to glorify Him, and if you won't do that willingly through faith and repentance, you will do that unwillingly in your damnation. Every knee *will* bow before this King!

Response #2: The Wicked, Lazy Servant

We'll come back to the two faithful servants, but first let's examine the response of the one who did nothing with his mina:

²⁰*Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹for 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.'*

This man either doesn't really know the character of the King, or he's just a lazy excuse-maker. He has no love for the King, no eagerness to submit to the King's command, to busy himself with the King's assets. He's doing his own thing. He's a careless, useless, thoughtless, selfish man. He has a breathtaking level of apathy towards the King and His

return, and the reckoning that is to come. And the King is surely not pleased with Him:

"²²He 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? ²³Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' ²⁵And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' ²⁶'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."

The big question is, "Is this guy in any better of a position than the enemies who are slaughtered? Is he saved?" I don't want to press this parable for more than it's intended to give us, but this man does not appear to be in a good place, is he? When He stands before Jesus, He is shamed and disgraced and stripped of everything. He has nothing by way of increase; all he "has" is what the King has entrusted to him. And that's stripped away in the end.

I agree with Don Carson:

"The King's servants are responsible to labor for the Master's affairs, and those who don't show themselves to be rebellious servants, no true servants at all. They are scarcely better than the enemies who defy the Master's kingship altogether."

Is that you? You're here, so it's unlikely you're an outright enemy. But you can be a "servant" of the King in that way, yet be utterly faithless and lazy and selfish when it comes to living your life for the King's business. You're here sometimes, you say He's your Lord. You believe you're going to heaven. But there's no thirst to learn or grow into His likeness, no real connection to a Body of believers who exhort and admonish and shepherd your soul, or vice versa, no generosity to the advancement of the Kingdom, no real investment of time, talent and treasure into the mission of making Jesus known.

At best you are in a dangerous, ambiguous place. Is this wicked servant “saved”? It’s pretty hard to tell. Is that how you’re living your life? As a lazy, wicked, selfish “servant”, with no evident love or respect or honor desire or submission to the King’s will? This is not a place you want to be. Own your hypocrisy and repent, today!

Response #3: The Faithful Servant(s)

*"¹⁶The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.'
¹⁷And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities...'"*

We could get into the specifics of the varying nature of these rewards, or of what it exactly it means to be given authority over cities, but I just want you to see something simple and breathtakingly beautiful here. Here are two servants who get busy serving Jesus. Knowing the Scriptures more broadly, they’re not serving out of fear or guilt or duty, but out of the joy of faith and love and gratitude and worship and devotion. They invest their resources into the King’s business. They know they can take no credit for it.

But they have seen the beauty of this Man, and their lips and lives proclaim, “How deserving of praise, how deserving of honor, how deserving of a life poured out.” And you – imperfect as your obedience is – are an absolute delight to Him: "¹⁷Well done, good servant!" This is a weight of glory beyond our wildest imagination.

C. S. Lewis famously said that there is a weight of glory that every Christian will bear, gloriously, wondrously, joyfully forever, and what weight is to hear the words, “Well done, good (and faithful) servant”. Here's what he wrote:

"To please God, to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness, to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in, as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son, it seems impossible. A weight or a burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain, but so it is."

Some of you labor under the burden of feeling that all you do is displease God. Maybe what I've said so far has even contributed to that. All you see is shortcomings everywhere: don't read the Bible the way you should, don't pray the way you should, don't talk the way you should, don't witness the way you should. You come to the end of every day feeling hopeless. You think your righteousness is filthy rags.

That is *not* the way God sees you, dearly loved child of God! Your obedience is a delight to Him, because it's the fruit and working of His own Spirit (Hebrews 13:21). Because of Christ, because of an act of faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit moves into your life, causes you to be born again, and puts Himself at the center, and the life of faithful service that flows out of this leads to His exuberant delight so that one day you hear, "Well, done, good and faithful servant." We have an incredibly gracious God! He praises and rewards and gushes over all the good that *He* has wrought in your life!

Conclusion: Look in, and Look Up

The possibilities described here – of inexpressible pleasure and joy on the one hand, and terror and shame and pain on the other – are immense. “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” And will it last! But all that’s done apart from Christ will perish. These words – and the fact that this Man’s face still confronts you at your local grocery store – demand that you take a careful look at yourself this morning. Are you His? Are you faithfully stewarding what He’s entrusted to you? If He were to return today, are you ready? If you were to commit to being more serious about His business in the next 3 months, what needs to happen?

But: “For every one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.” Look in, but look much at Him. His past grace, present grace, and future grace. Secure in His Fatherly love, serving in the power of His Spirit, praised and rewarded when the Son returns from heaven. May God, and God alone, receive the glory in your life, and in the life of JCF.