

The ROI From a Returning King

Luke 19:11-27

“Engage in business until I come”

Introduction: Investing for the future imperative to stewardship. Whether that investment is financial or people, pouring resource into the present for future yield is wise. Most often this means consistent, steady, and restrained effort, but every so often we believe that we can strike it rich quickly. Over the last 150 years, scores of people have spent millions of dollars on a little postage stamp sized island off or Nova Scotia looking for buried treasure. The island is called Oak Island and has seen drilling expeditions and investments from 1862 until present day, from future presidents like FDR to movie stars like Errol Flynn or John Wayne, to present day searches, treasure hunters are hoping to find gold, lost jewels, or Shakespeare’s manuscripts in a supposed buried vault. Fortunes have been squandered, 6 lives have been lost, and time has been wasted in a pursuit of a legendary story that is nothing more than that. Somehow legend has turned into story, and story into fact, which has compelled people to give their lives for something that *may yield a rich reward*, and what they find instead is simply more rock, mud, and heartache.

What we invest in matters. The last story in the gospels before Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is a story of what His servants invest in. Though this investment encompasses our money, it has nothing to do with markets, the DOW index, or interest rates. It has everything to do with what we value the most, what truly matters, and when we’ll actually receive it. Jesus intended to challenge those following Him to evaluate their faithfulness and commitment to the mission He gave them, not the one they had in their own mind. In framing this teaching in parable, we are able to apply this to our context as well. As we enter into this story, we will find **3 distinct responses to the truth that Jesus gives**, one being overwhelmingly positive, and two being heartbreakingly negative. The reality of the story is that **each of us is in it**. We are in one of these three groups. So the stakes are high.

The Setting In Context (11)

Luke 19:11 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**.

Jesus’ mission reiterated

Jesus had entered Jericho with massive crowds in tow. They were intrigued, had begun to see more miracles (like the lepers healed), and were anticipating seeing Lazarus and more in Jerusalem. Upon entering the bustling and metropolitan city, Jesus did **two amazing things**: he healed marginalized blind beggars, offering not only physical sight but spiritual, and he went to the house of Zacchaeus, perhaps the most hated and least likely salvation candidates in the city. If we step back and look at what He *could have done*, who He could have interacted with if His goal were to bring a following with Him into Jerusalem, these two events become even more significant. Jesus offered salvation to the **least likely**, those who would not be deemed "high upside" followers, and those whom the culture had ignored or moved away from. On top of this, these were two groups that **Jesus Himself pursued**, both in having Bartimaeus come to Him and inviting Himself to Zachaeus' house. *What was behind all of this?* The last line recorded to Zachaeus sums it up: *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*. This is as significant in what is said as it is in what is NOT said. It is this purpose, to bring salvation through the message of the good news of the Kingdom that Jesus taught the next parable.

Expectation of the crowd mitigated

Jesus was leaving Jericho for the 17 mile, uphill march to Jerusalem, which would have taken about 6 hours. Its important to picture this in your mind. The route would have taken Him to a place by Bethphage and Bethany, and then they would hike over the Mount of Olives. As one crested the mount, the whole of Jerusalem would come into view. The people, along with His disciples, were anticipating this mighty entrance, one fit for a King. He would enter Jerusalem like a conquering hero, with a throng of followers, to set up a Kingdom that they would be a part of. And here is the truth: **they were not wrong!** This is exactly what Jesus will do one day. He will reign on a throne, setting up a Kingdom, and rule from Jerusalem. But not yet.

Notice in verse 11 that Jesus told this parable because the people supposed the Kingdom was going to appear immediately. Jesus did not correct their view of the Kingdom, but He reigned in the timing of it. He came the first time to offer salvation through His death, which meant He had to go to the cross and die, SO THAT He could gather a people to Himself. The OT sacrificial system pointed to this, He becoming the once for all, perfect, substitutionary sacrifice that satisfied the wrath of God. The people understood the prophecies of Messiah's rule, but missed the part of Messiah's suffering and death (like Isaiah 52-53).

There will come a day that Jesus will bring justice and peace, righting wrongs and caring like a loving King. **But that was NOT THE PRIMARY REASON HE CAME THE FIRST TIME.** He came to offer salvation through faith in His work, grace to repent and believe, and the Spirit to empower us to follow and learn. This means that our primary work now is not to bring justice, or ease pain, or right wrongs, though that is certainly part of our compassionate response. Jesus was clearly compassionate in His time on earth, but when He ascended to heaven, there still was sickness, disease, a tyrannical ruler in place that persecuted His followers, and injustice was the norm. He will wipe all of that out one day. For now, in this time, His goal was to offer salvation through His blood.

Experience in history explicated

Now we have studied Jesus' parables before as He has told many in Luke. Each story was ground in reality, relatable to the people's experience, like farming, shepherding, or parenting. This story is no different, yet it is out of **our** experience. In fact, the story itself is not hard to understand, but understanding the cultural nuance is difficult on first read. A nobleman goes to a far off country to get a kingdom??! That is nothing we have experienced. Now if He said a businessman reality star went to Washington to become president, we'd understand that one!

Jesus founded the parable on a story from His youth that ALL THE PEOPLE LISTENING WOULD UNDERSTAND. Rome was the ruler of the world, yet from region to region they would set up vassal kings to rule. Herod the Great, an Idumean, went to Rome to convince Mark Antony to give him the kingship over this coveted area in 41 B.C. and by 37 B.C had secured sole rulership, even giving himself the humble name of "the Great". After Herod died, the land was split up and given to his three sons, of which **Archalaus** received the area of Judea and Samaria. He even set up a palace in Jericho. The people Jesus was talking to would remember Archalaus.

Archalaus wanted the title "king" like his father, but only Rome could grant him that honor. So Archalaus left Judea and travelled to Rome with a delegation of family members. While there, another group followed to appeal to Caesar NOT to grant it. Upon receiving the throne, Archalaus decided to kill 3000 Jews at the first Passover, both out of paranoia and ruthlessness to make sure the people feared him. Jews in Rome told Caesar that Archalaus was not fit to rule and did not deserve to be king. Caesar did what politicians do: he tried to please everyone. He gave Archalaus the title **ethnarch** (rule over an ethnic group of people) until he proved himself. Upon his return to the land, he would deal with those who opposed him and those who were loyal.

The Story Explained

Luke 19:12 He said therefore, "A **nobleman** went into a **far country** to receive for himself a **kingdom** and then **return**.¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'

King's Charge

Jesus bridges this well known account into the reality of what He was about to do. He was and is the greatest Noble Man the world has known. He was going to the cross, and in His resurrection was going to go away to receive a Kingdom from His Father in order to return again one day. It was in this path that God would highly exalt Him and give Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). In the ascension, Jesus would be seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20), awaiting His return in power and authority (Rev. 19). *What Jesus is addressing is what would happen in the meantime!* What was the call of His servants and followers in the time between His ascension and His return.

In the parable, He gathered 10 servants to Himself, which was a representative number rather than a complete one. To each servant he gave a single *mina*, which would have been equivalent to about 3 months salary for a day laborer. This would not have been an immense amount, but enough to turn a profit. The expectation is that they would take that money gifted to them, stewarded to them, and **engage in business**. The root word for this is "pragma", which is where we would get the word *pragmatic*. They were to be active in using what was given to have something more in the end. The timeframe given to these servants was the return of the King.

Servant's response

There are three groups that are represented in this parable: **the free, the fearful, and the foes**. The free and the fearful are the servants, where the foes are those that overtly opposed the King. The first two were given the minas, the third were not. Each was given a reward of consequence based on their response to the King. Before we see how each responded, we have to clarify **two important things**:

1) The three groups were present as Jesus was walking - The first two groups were followers, or disciples, which we'll see a differentiation in the story. The free were true followers, the ones who were faithful and truly saved. The second group were those who hailed Jesus as King, threw down branches, but rejected Him when the stakes got too high and their fear of the religious leaders too great. Their faith was as deep as water on a plate, and though they did not overtly rebel, they did not know Jesus. The third group would have been the religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes who were actively seeking to arrest and kill Jesus (John 11:53)

2) The *minas* entrusted was the good news of the Kingdom, the entrusted gospel. In **Luke 24:46-48**, Jesus laid out this charge to the disciples:

"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that **repentance and forgiveness** of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power on high."

Before He ascended, His disciples asked Him the *timing of the restoration of the Kingdom*, to which He responded that no one knows the times and seasons, but that they would "*receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) This is the gospel that is entrusted to us (1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:12) that

we seek to entrust to others (2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2). This is the investment that Jesus stewards us with in His absence, that true followers will faithfully see a ROI.

The Settling Up Defined

Free are Rewarded for Faithfulness

Now the story moves forward to the returning of the king, as He approaches each servant given a mina (v. 15). The first group He approached Him revealing that the one given mina had yielded a 10 fold gain! **Notice** the humility of this first servant. He responded to the king saying "**YOUR mina has produced this**". He did not point to his effort, nor boast in his methods, but simply stated that the king's investment made the king more. To this the king responded by saying, **Well done, good servant!** Faithfulness in something small would yield faithfulness over 10 cities in the Kingdom. The second came to him giving the king **5 minas**, which the king rewarded with 5 cities. These first two were similar in reward, neither was criticized, and both were welcomed by the king. What do we learn?

- **Gospel faithfulness now is truly gearing for something future** - This parable gives us a monumentally new perspective. Everything that we do today is geared for something future. The goal and greater purpose is living life with an eye not on retirement, but on Christ's future Kingdom. This means that what we do today should reflect that reality, including how we leverage our time, money, and possessions for this **FUTURE KINGDOM**, not a present one.
- **Gospel faithfulness is seen as faithful in "small"** - In the scope of eternity, the entrustment of the gospel to us now is the "faithful in small". This is different than the parable of talents in Matthew 25. In this parable everyone is given the same amount of the investment. The gospel is obviously no small thing, nor is insignificant, but it is the *gateway into the Kingdom*. The future reality is living out the realities in the Kingdom, not the gateway. If we cannot be faithful with the gateway, how will we be faithful with the reality it leads to.
- **The yield is up to God, because its all for Him** - The yield of the investment is produced by God because its all going back to Him. This means that the issue at hand for us is one of faithfulness. I just talked to a friend who is a coach at a major college athletic program, and he said in his early years he was slow to overtly talk about his faith and reality of the gospel in his life because of what it might mean to him or his program. Then God convicted him to be bold about the gospel, bold in sharing what he believed, and though it meant some thought his program was "too much about Jesus", that same boldness has transformed his team. Our call is to **faithfulness**. If God chooses to yield 10 or 5, that is for His glory!
- **Rewards in the future is motivating** - Notice that the free and faithful servants are rewarded with **real** responsibility in the kingdom. This is not metaphorical or allegorical, but an opportunity in the future to reign with Christ, serving Him in these capacities. The ultimate reward of heaven is Jesus, but our desire to is serve Him both now and forever. The reward is **NOT ABOUT US**, but how we can continue to make much of Him into eternity. Faithfulness in the meantime positions us to serve Him faithfully forever. Its hard on this side, in our flesh, to separate **reward from selfish indulgence**, but in the future kingdom it will not be so.

The free and faithful servant is categorized by leveraging everything to see a yield in the entrustment of the gospel. They are living for a true and sure future reality, and seek to be faithful now so they can be faithful then. *What keeps us from doing this? Why is this so hard for believers to truly live out? What are we so easily distracted by? What other things are we tempted to invest in?*

Fearful are Rejected for Falsehood

This second group is perhaps the most important to understand. This was a group of **servants**, those who were following Jesus, who at some level and in some ways wanted to be around Jesus. They were given the same entrustment as the other two, but when the King returned, they pulled out a napkin and returned the same *mina* back. His reasoning was simple enough: **I was afraid**. He feared the King, thinking Him a severe man who took back what He did not sow or deposit. His response in fear was to sit on the *mina*, to hide it, to do nothing with it. Not only that, but he put it in a handkerchief, which is not a secure place.

The response of the King is terrifying. He not only called this servant **wicked**, which is hardly language of a Father to a child, but He made it clear this servant DID NOT TRULY KNOW THE KING (Matthew 7:21-23). He was **afraid instead of having proper fear**. He became a prophet against himself. Instead of believing the King was severe, motivating him to action, he lived practically like the King did not exist. The consequence of this action was the *mina* he had been given was taken away and given to the first servant. *What does this all mean for us?*

- **Not everyone who knows the gospel is truly saved** - This servant followed Jesus, heard the message, could even repeat it back, but it was an artificial faith. This servant knew **about** the king, but did not **know Him**, and the difference was one of relationship. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds threw down branches and welcomed Him as King. When He did not live up to their expectations, they left.
- **Gospel yield can only come out of gospel transformation** - The minas actually show us that to truly be a steward of the gospel it actually has had to transform us. We cannot offer forgiveness to others unless we have received forgiveness. We cannot call others to repent unless we ourselves have done so. We cannot offer the goodness, love, and freedom of Jesus Christ until we have tasted of it. We cannot call people to deny self in this life and live for the Return of the King unless we ourselves believe it. The reason we'd be impotent in seeing fruitfulness in gospel work is not about methods, its about metamorphosis, the change in our heart, motivation, purpose, and goals in life.
- **This middle ground is where most live** - This group made up the majority of people surrounding Jesus, and it is the same group today. We have created a middle ground type of following in terms of living for Christ in light of the gospel. Its one of moderation, or balance, of safety. it says that we can have Jesus and keep life the way we want it, accepting Jesus as long as He does not demand too much. It is one that keeps Jesus hidden from the world, that never talks about Him to our friends and co-workers, and views life as purely an 80 years venture, rather than the next 80 billion. This is the group that will stand before Christ and point to accomplishments as reason for Kingdom entrance, and He will utter, "Depart from me, I never knew you".

Foes are Reckoned for Rebellion

The last group was the delegation who tried to keep the King from returning. This is the group that wants nothing to do with Jesus, wanted to see Him stay away, and put Him on the cross. This is anyone who opposes Jesus in a high handed way, opposes those who are for Him, coming out of a hatred of Jesus. This obviously departs from the story of Archelaus since Jesus never did anything to elicit this kind of hate. The consequence of this rebellion is severe. Words are not minced. They are slaughtered before Him, judged and condemned for their opposition.

So the question remains:

Who are you in the story? What will the King find when He comes?

The sobering reality is that everyone is somewhere in this story, and everyone has to account to the King one day. Jesus will return, and there will be rejoicing and weeping, some will praise Him by bowing down to their king, while others will be forced to bow down in judgment. We have all been given access to the same message. The question is what we will do with it.

To the free: Are we living in a way that sees the gospel as an entrusted investment? This has been a sobering reality for me this week. Am I living in fear? Am I distracted? Am I busy doing things that don't matter? Am I seeking to serve today so I can serve Him forever?

To the fearful: Are you trying to live in the artificial middle? Has the gospel changed you, or do you simply give lip service to it? God does not want your words, He wants you. He does not want your church attendance, moralism, and pithy service, He wants all of you. Today is the day of salvation if you would yield your life to Him, repent of your sin, and receive forgiveness for the first time. Give your life up now to gain it forever.

Are we as a church "engaging in the business" of gospel stewardship in the meantime? What needs to change? What would be different about us if we did?