

The context of the parable – Jesus is traveling on the way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and has stopped in Jericho. In this passage, we are apparently still at the home of Zacchaeus', as v.28 indicates that they go ahead on to Jerusalem.

The purpose for this parable (v.11)

- We are told the specific reason Jesus spoke this parable, which should give much help in interpreting it.
- 1.) **He was near Jerusalem.** He has revealed to them that He is going there to be betrayed, turned over to the authorities, tortured, and crucified. Jericho is about 6 hours away traveling by foot, so they are very close to accomplishing and completing this last phase of ministry.
- 2.) **They thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately.** Despite all of the clear teaching on the nature of the Kingdom and Jesus' purpose for going to Jerusalem (v.31), they still expect something else. They expect that Jesus would enter Jerusalem, take a literal political position on the throne of David, and set up His earthly Kingdom.
- In Matthew 20:20ff, we have the account of the disciples (and a mother) asking for them to have prominent places in Jesus' kingdom. The significance of this is that it takes place around the same time as our passage, just before the so-called "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. As we will see, the parable speaks specifically to that issue.
- As we think about Jerusalem, we realize that this would have been a particularly good time for Him to do this (had this been what the Lord intended). They were going up during the feast of Passover, when Jews from the dispersion would all be gathered together in Jerusalem. This was a time of unrest, and the embers of revolution were ever ready to be fanned into a flame of rebellion.
- Jesus sees their misunderstanding, and tells this parable to particularly address their wrong thinking. We should pay special attention to the purpose, so that we can see the focus of His meaning in interpreting it.

I. STAGE 1 - THE NOBLEMAN'S JOURNEY (vv.12-14)

- I consider this the parable of the Nobleman, as he is really the main character. The word nobleman means someone of distinguished birth and/or wealth. We are told that this man is about to take a trip to a far country to receive a kingdom. Previous to studying this verse, I had always assumed that he was going perhaps to receive a kingdom from another land. He was to conquer, or have that place given to him and then return to his own kingdom. But in studying it out it is clear that he goes to a far place in order to receive the rights of the kingdom in which he now dwells.
- The historical reference is to a person who would travel to Rome to receive their official position as a king or ruler of a land. They would go to Rome to have the authorities declare them to be the rightful ruler. That person would then have the backing of Rome to enforce their right as king over their kingdom. This was common in those days, and we have examples of Herod the Great and Archelaus doing this very thing.

The Servants

- In preparation for his journey the man calls his ten servants. There is probably no significance in the number other than representing all of his servants. To each of them he gives one mina. A mina would have been the equivalent of 100 days wages for working man. This would have been far more than any of them would have had on their own, and also indicates something of the wealth of the nobleman.
- We notice that he gives the same amount to each of the servants in contrast to the parable of the talents where the emphasis is how each one is bestowed different gifts and is responsible for them, here the emphasis is on everyone having the same thing.
- He then charges them to "Do business (make a profit) until I come" (hapax legomenon). They were expected to use that money to gain more while he was gone.. They aren't given the specifics of how, but what is specific is that he will return, and they must give an account.
- This "doing business" covers the entire time between the departure of the Lord into heaven and His return at the last day.

The Citizens

- The next group of people is introduced, the citizens. These are the people of that place, who live in the land that is rightfully the king's (though he hasn't received the official approval). It says that these people "hated him" (lit. continued to hate him). Because of this hatred, and with the knowledge that this king was going away to receive authority over them, they respond by collecting and sending a delegation after him. The delegation is not to appeal to him ("you"), but *this one* (used in disdain). This also has historical example. In both the case of Herod and Archelaus, the citizens of their land sent delegations to Caesar to appeal to him to try to thwart his appointing them as rulers.
- Their appeal "we will not have this man reign over us." They are expressing their desire as citizens.
- We have no indication that the nobleman responds, but continues in his purpose.

II. STAGE 2 - THE NOBLEMAN'S RETURN (vv.15-27)

- Continuing the parable, the Nobleman goes to the far country and receives the kingdom. He is gone away for an uncertain amount of time, but eventually does return. Notice that at his return he doesn't become king, but is already king and exercises that right fully when he returns.
- As anticipated, he calls his servants to whom he had given the money. The purpose is to find out from them how busy in his business they had been. His call had been to gain a profit from what he freely gave them, and now was a time of accounting.

- Before we look at this three, we could ask the question "why isn't there a reference to all 10? " This is likely because in these three is a sampling sufficient to know what the master said in all 10 cases.
- 1.) First servant – He had earned ten minas from the one. He had been very busy and diligent with what had been give. He earned ten times what he had been given, and was ready at the return of his lord.
 - Notice that his emphasis was not on what he had done, but affirmed that what had been given was that of the nobleman's: "your mina has earned." He is humble, not boasting in his work, but what his master's investment had returned. He knew he could do nothing apart from what he had been given.
 - The master responds most with approval and affirmation: "well", but stronger in the Greek. He is joyful and pleased with his servant's effort. His response is then to bestow on him the authority over ten cities. Now he moves from being a mere servant to a ruler in his kingdom.
- 2.) Second servant – He had earned five minas from the one. While not as successful as the first, he was faithful and had gained 5x what he had been given. We notice the master doesn't compare the two, but moves him from the position of a servant to a ruler over five cities.
- 3.) Third servant – When called, this servant gives back the single mina. He affirms that it is the master's mina, but then gives the reason why it is only one. It isn't because he tried his best and eventually just broke even. It is because he did nothing with it. He had been told to "do business", but hadn't. He had shirked his responsibility and directly disobeyed his master. He took the single mina and hid it away in a handkerchief (or sweat cloth).
 - He then gives his reason. He says he feared the nobleman. The reason for this fear (so he says) is that the master is "austere" (severe, unreasonable, hard). He uses two small proverbs to summarize his estimation, that he expected to collect where he hadn't deposited and reap where he didn't sew. In other words he pictures the nobleman as standing at a bank demanding money where he did not put any, and standing at a field demanding fruit where no seed had been sewn. He was essentially a greedy thief, expecting people to do for him what was impossible.
 - However, he is condemned by his own words. What had been deposited to the servant? What had been sewn to the servant? And what did the master expect? Not blood out of a turnip, but reasonable return on what he had deposited and sewn.
 - The mans says he feared, but he really didn't. He didn't fear the master enough obey him, but rather chose to disobey his direct command. He was accusing the character of his master when the blame was really his own.
 - This servant did not feel the honor that had been given to him, that he should be entrusted with the Lord's wealth. At the end of the day, this servant did not know the king. He did not believe in his good and righteous character.
 - The master responds by condemning him by his own words. If this is the case, why didn't you at least deposit the money to gain some minimal interest. Even in this, we see that the servant had been a bad judge of character. The nobleman was gracious, expecting only faithfulness, not intent on the amount.
 - So the nobleman has this man's mina taken away from him, and given to the one with ten minas. Just to pause to notice that the servant still has possession of the minas. He is now himself a rich man, and is made richer by this man's wickedness.
- **His response to the citizens** – v.27
- At this point in the parable the nobleman deals with the rebellion of the citizens who had opposed him. Their refusal to have this nobleman rule over them didn't change the fact that he did. When he returns, he calls for them to be brought into his presence and destroyed. This is the imagery Eastern practice, for the kings enemies to be slain in his presence.

INTERPRETATION/APPLICATION

- In interpreting parables, we must be careful trying to assign something to every detail. However in this one, there seem to be such clear and easy parallels. What should drive our interpretation is the purpose we are told (above)
- **The nobleman** – obviously referring to the Lord Jesus. He is the one of most noble birth, whom the Father appointed to be King of His Kingdom. While on earth as a man, He had not fully been crowned with that honor. It was a time of "humiliation", and afterwards glory. He has now gone to the Father and has now received the Kingdom, seated at God's right hand, sitting on the throne of His glory. This is the stage 1.
- Then is stage 2: the glorious return of Christ. At that time he calls all into account, those identified as his servants, and those who rejected him. He has sovereign power appointed by the one much greater than Caesar, and His return is certain.
- **The servants** – This is those who are identified as servants of Christ, the church. This is those who have been entrusted equally the Word of God, and who have been told by our Lord "do business." What is our primary business? HIS business. To labor in His kingdom, to live as if the one who is King is about to return and call us to account.
- In that day we will not take credit, but recognize that it was His Word that by grace was given us.
- "I have done nothing, but the Word has done it all" "All power is in the Word, not in those who preach, teach, and apply it. - Luther
- And what is the reward? Ruler over many cities. There is reward and profit far beyond what we earned or deserved. God gives us grace which enables us to work, then rewards that word abundantly above our labors. This is GRACE!

- This also corrects the disciples' view that the Kingdom was coming, and they would rule in the earth as great men now. This isn't the case, but rather the pattern is the same for us now. If we serve faithfully now as servants, it is then that we shall rule with Him on His throne - Rev3:21
- We will all be called to account for what we have done with His Word, the Gospel. Are we busy with it, are we doing business, are we seeking to labor to see it have an abundant return? Or are we like the unfaithful servant, sitting on it. Do we have a bad view of God saying "He is so harsh, and is going to require what I can't give. His standards are too hard and difficult. It is better just to do nothing!" If so, then our end is the same as this one.
- There are some who will be exposed only at the Lord's return. There are those presently identified as the servants of Christ who, in the end, will be exposed. What is their trait? Hard thoughts of God. Refusal to use what God has given them to "do business" until he comes, but absorbed only in their own business in this life. Lack of a real godly fear which motivates to action to do at least some things.
 - The Word is not intended for mere private possession and individual enjoyment; it is a capital that is designed for doing spiritual business in the world... Sham disciples who take the Word but do nothing with it for themselves or other. – Lenski*
 - They never use them in the service of the Lord Jesus; and, in regard to their influences on the church of the world, it would be the same if God had never conferred on them these talents. – Barnes*
- We presently live between vv. 14 & 15. What are we doing? Are we busy with the Work of our King?
- **The citizens** – At one level, this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. It was at that time that those who formally refused the rule of Jesus over them were destroyed as God's covenant nation. There was an initial kind of coming of Christ upon the nation which brought destruction and left them desolate (as a nation), though there were many Jews (including the disciples) who received Him as King of a different kind of Kingdom.
- This also foreshadows the coming day of the Lord to destroy all of His enemies. To not NOW accept and submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is to be, in fact, His enemy.
- There is a temporary allowance for those who do not what Christ to rule over them. In the parable, they lived in relative peace and did not see the practical effects of His Lordship....until His return. At that time they painfully knew that they would indeed be ruled by Him, and not in the way that is pleasant. Their desire not to have him over them did not change the reality of it.
- There are those who even now hate Jesus "without a cause" (Jn15:25). The delegation of their heart is "we will not have this man to reign over us." But the time is coming when they will be declared for what they are: enemies of Christ. Scripture speaks plainly about this destruction - 2Thes1:8-9
 - Whoever will not be ruled by the grace of Christ will inevitably be ruined by the wrath of Christ. – Henry*
- There is a Christian saying that goes "If Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all"