

Serving a New King

Luke

By Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Luke 19:11-27

Preached on: Sunday, January 9, 2011

First Presbyterian Church

1324 Marion St
Columbia, SC 29201

Website: www.firstprescolumbia.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/fpccolumbia

Now you will find our Scripture reading today in the pew Bible, if you are using it, page 878, children's Bible page 1292 and our reading is from Luke's gospel chapter 19 and verses 11 through 27.

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. He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' 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. 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.' 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, he 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.'"¹

¹ Luke 19:11-27.

We are returning this morning to the series of sermons that we have been engaged in for many months now in the gospel according to Luke from which we departed over the advent season and the beginning of the new year. And our series now will lead us providentially right into Easter week, the passion of our Lord Jesus and then his glorious resurrection and his teaching to his disciples as he sends them out into the world to be witnesses to him.

Let me remind you of the story so far as Luke has told it. The Lord Jesus has come into the world to be our Savior and he has begun to establish the kingdom of God. He has been baptized by John and anointed by God's Holy Spirit and he has begun to preach that the kingdom of God long promised, often promised in the Old Testament Scriptures has now intersected with time. The kingdom of God has come here because God's King has arrived on the scene of history. He proves that he has established that kingdom over against the kingdoms of the powers of darkness by withstanding the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. And then, as it were, having created a bridge head into enemy occupied territory, he demonstrates his kingly power by reversing the effects of sin and the impact of bondage to the powers of darkness in the likes of men and women. And so he heals the sick. He cleanses lepers. He stills storms. He raises from the dead. He shows the power of the kingdom in his actions and the truth of the kingdom in his teaching. He is beginning to create a new society, a new humanity, men and women and boys and girls who are wonderfully set free to live for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he has begun to teach his disciples about discipleship.

And Luke very cleverly frames that teaching within the scope of a long journey that Jesus takes beginning in chapter nine and ending now in chapter 19. In chapter nine there is a transition in Jesus' ministry and from now on he has set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem where he is going to die for our sins and rise to be our Lord and master. And on this long journey, as the disciples follow the Lord Jesus literally, he is teaching them what it means to follow him spiritually.

And a glance down at our passage today in its context will indicate to you that this journey is almost at an end. This is his final parable, the climactic moment of that journey. And as Jesus rounds the corner, he is going to see Jerusalem. He is going to weep over it and he is going to be received into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday with ecstasy and joy, because people believe that the King has come. And that is the meaning of the parable in its context.

You would notice, if you read through Luke's gospel, that he has a habit, actually a very helpful habit—I wish more teachers had this habit—of telling you what the parable is about before he tells you the parable. And so Jesus' parable here, Luke tells us is being told because he is near to Jerusalem and because many of those who are hurrying to Jerusalem with him suppose that the kingdom of God is about to break in in its final form, that Jesus who has shown so much power over darkness and disease will similarly show that power over the Roman Empire, that he will deliver his people from their bondage to Rome that Jerusalem will become the great capital city envisaged in the Old Testament Scriptures that King David's Son will be King David's greater Son, that they

will be part of the power people of the world, the great community of the world and that the final—and, in their eyes—political kingdom of God will be gloriously brought in. And they are entirely mistaken. And so Jesus has to tell them this parable that he has brought in the kingdom, but that what is going to happen in Jerusalem in the next few days is not the consummation of that kingdom, that there is a long way to go. There is a long time to serve until the kingdom of God is fully and finally established.

And, indeed, God has no intention of establishing that kingdom by a political messiah, but through the witness of those who are meek in Spirit and have inherited the kingdom of God, those who suffer for the sake of the gospel, those who humbly follow the Lord Jesus and become his witnesses throughout the earth. And most of them simply didn't understand it. As we would say today, they just didn't get it.

And it is very tempting for us to say Jesus should have sat down. It surely shouldn't have taken him more than a few hours of seminar instruction and everything would be clear. But you remember how at the end of his ministry to them the Lord Jesus says to them, "I have so much more to teach you, but you are not able to take it in." He was a very wise teacher. He had so much more to teach them, but they were so slow of understanding, so slow of heart that he knew in a sense he had to simply gradually lead them from their confusion to clarity and that clarity wouldn't come until they realized he had actually come to be a dying Messiah, not a political Messiah.

I think I can understand that. I think it would be true that if in all the unwisdom I have I committed the great unwisdom and decided that some Sunday I was going to tell you everything I think we need to know to live to the glory of God. There would come a point, probably about two o'clock on this Sunday afternoon when lots of people would be standing up and screaming and saying, "We can't take any more of this."

So we mustn't look down on these disciples. Understand that in many ways we share the same situation, that we are often tempted to want a kingdom that comes quickly and not to be called, as this parable makes so clear, to a life of humble and fruitful service.

Jesus is saying to his disciples, "You disciples, if you are in it for the long haul need to understand that there are two fixed dates on the divine calendar. One of them is about to take place when I die in weakness and rise in power. The other is removed from it at a distance when I come in majesty and glory. And between these two fixed points in history I am calling you to be my humble servants and to use the resources, the treasures of the gospel that I am giving to you in order that you may bear much fruit.

Well, if that is the general meaning of the parable in its gospel context, what is the message of the parable in today's context? Well, it is obvious, isn't it, that Christian people need to learn, more than anything else, that we live the whole of our Christian lives between two fixed dates. And to make it clear let me emphasize those two fixed dates are not the day of my birth and the day of my death. Those are not the two dates that dominate the Christian's life. They may dominate non Christian's lives. They think

all that life is, you come into the world and you leave the world. That is all it is. There is no big story.

But the two dates that dominate and formulate the Christian life are the dates of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, having borne our sins and our guilt and sending the Holy Spirit to apply to the lives of his people all that he has one for us, that is date number one. I live looking back to Christ's finished work for my salvation and I live looking forward not to the day of my death, but to the day of his coming again in majesty and glory. For he will finally establish his kingdom. And when that calendar is in my mind, it has a dramatic impact on my life. You see it in the case of these servants. The two dates that mattered to them were the date the king went to get his kingdom and the date when the king returned to establish that kingdom and to ask his servants how did you serve me in my physical absence?

Perhaps the most famous illustration of this certainly in the last 50 years in the Christian Church is one that was used by the European New Testament theologian Oscar Coleman who at least when he used it was able to rely on the fact that his contemporaries had in living memory the Second World War and, especially the events that brought it to an end. The marvelous extraordinary events of the landing in Normandy and the signal victory of the allied forces that came to be known as D-day. And then a year later the conclusion of the war that came to be known as VE day. And Coleman says the Christian life is like living between D-day and VE day. The great decisive issue has been settled in Jesus Christ and for us who have become Jesus Christ and when looking forward to the day when that will become, as it were, fully public. But in between those two dates, as some of you know because you lived through them, there were fatalities. There was stiff opposition. There was fighting. There was rebellion. There was pain. There was discouragement and there was disappointment. The difference was that the decisive victory had been gained and all the ongoing struggle was in the life of that victory, not in order to accomplish that victory.

And this is what Jesus is saying. He is saying, "My kingdom is established." He had gone to the far country actually within living memory of some of those who listened. They remembered how the son of Herod the Great had gone to Rome to get his kingdom in a sinister and dark way, but here is Jesus dying on the cross, rising from the grave, ascending to the right hand of his Father and receiving the kingdom. "All authority in heaven and earth," he says, "has been given to me." And then saying to his disciples, "There are many who say, 'We will not have this man to reign over us. There will be much opposition and hostility.' But go about my business. Serve me for my glory."

And so these three servants come to see the master on his return and this is surely the really interesting part of this parable. The first one comes in verses 16 and 17. He had been given, I suppose, about nine month's wages. And he has turned it into well nigh eight year's wages in that time, 800 percent profit margin. That is not too bad. And the second one comes in and he has got a maybe 400 percent profit margin. And you notice what the master says to them.

To the first he says, "Well done good and faithful servant. You used what I gave you, the resources I gave you and you were given one and you made 10." Actually I guess that is 1000 percent, isn't it? "Know what I am going to do? I am going to put you in charge of 10 cities."

And the next one comes in, "I am going to put you in charge of five cities."

I hope you get the point. There is a kind of a relationship between their service and the blessing the master gives. But the blessing, now this is the point, please try and just capture this. The point is that the blessing is out of all proportion to the service. You come along and you serve the Lord Jesus Christ in whatever sphere he sets you and at the end he says, "Now," he says, "Well done good and faithful servant. I am going to make you mayor of Columbia because you really you and your family really love living there. And while we are at it, you might as well have Charlotte and Atlanta." That would be a challenge. "And, you know, how about Philadelphia? Well, no, let's stay in the South. Maybe somewhere else. What about Charleston? Lots of tourists there. And since you remember having Ferguson and he was a Scottish minister, how about Edinburgh?"

Now what are you going to say? If you are not totally intoxicated by this extraordinary gift you would say, "Lord, what did I ever do to deserve this?" Aren't you? What did I ever do to deserve this?" And he is going to say to you, "{?}. Don't you understand that I am full of grace and that that was why you delighted to serve me?"

And then this poor little miserable fellow comes in, pulls his hankie out of his pocket and he opens up his hanky and the king is waiting. What has he got in his hanky? He has got exactly what the king gave to him. His hanky is dirty because he took it down and he said, "Sir, you gave me this and you get it back."

Now what was the motivation? Now this is the heart of things.

There servant says, "I knew you were a hard man."

He says, "You knew I was a hard man. Did you just see these other fellows walking out of the room? One of them {?} he gave me 10 cities to be in charge of, five cities to be in charge of. Is that a hard man? You pull your handkerchief out of your pocket. I emptied my pockets in grace and love into these men's lives. Your tragic problem is you thought I was a hard man and so you never had any motivation to serve me or love me. You missed it all altogether and even what you have is going to be given to the one who made so much.

That is very telling, isn't it? I say it is very telling because I would be amazed if you don't know this third man. This third man wanders around every Christian Church every Sunday so hard to serve God. I have got to work so hard. I am trying my best and he is so narrow and he just seems to have a downer on me.

Well, you see the problem with the third man is he doesn't know his master at all. That is

his problem, isn't it? He just doesn't... and not only does he not know his master, but he suffers from a delusion about his master's character. And this, you see, this is what keeps you going over the long haul, that the Lord Jesus turns the responsibilities of service, the duties of service into a delight because he is such a gracious master. And the tragedy would be that if you had the spirit of the third man who interestingly is so reminiscent of the second brother, isn't he, in the parable of the prodigal son who said to the father, "You never... You know, I have served you. I have slaved for you all my life and you have never given me a party. And this wretch comes home and you kill the fatted calf."

Oh, he says, "My son everything I have... You could have had everything I had, but you thought I was a hard man."

And when something of this grace of the Lord Jesus Christ strikes us, yes, it may be a long haul. There may be much difficulty. There may be great weakness and many struggles, but serving this King is joy and freedom and grace indeed.

Most of us in this congregation have either read or seen Jane Austen's greatest novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Whichever version you choose, the story is roughly the same. Whether you have read it or seen the BBC version of it slumped on the couch for eight hours or saw the Hollywood version and got it all over in 100 minutes or whatever with your favorite Mr. Darcy and your favorite Elizabeth Bennett, whoever it was, you remember one of the turning points in that great novel comes—you are all experts in it so you know it comes in chapter 43—when Elizabeth Bennett and her Uncle and Aunt Gardener pay a visit to Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's great country house. Certainly in the BBC version it was a great country house. And they are shown round the house. That is the bit I doubt. They are shown round the house by Mrs. Reynolds who is the household servant and they come to the portrait of horrible Mr. Wickham. How we hate horrible Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*, that nasty Mr. Wickham.

And then is it the aunt Mrs. Gardener who see the portrait of Darcy and says, "Is this Mr. Darcy"? And asks Elizabeth and Mrs. Reynolds says, "You know the master." And then she says this about Mr. Darcy whom Elizabeth Bennett had thought so aloof and so proud and so hard. Says Mrs. Reynolds, "He is the best landlord and the best master."

And Jane Austen tells us that from that moment Elizabeth Bennett began to see Darcy in—this is the expression—an amiable light, a lovable light, someone you would want to pursue and be with and love and be befriended by.

You know, that is an adjective. We don't use it much today even in South Carolina, I don't think. That is an adjective our Christian forefathers often used to use about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is so amiable. He is so lovable. He is so gracious. When you know him, you want to be with him to serve him, turns duty into delight.

Now my friends, what a word for our new leaders, that they should serve the Lord Jesus this way. But what a word for all of us that we should find the Lord Jesus amiable. That is a good word to use some time this week. Blame it on me if you want and say, "You

know, one of the things we were thinking about in our church on Sunday is how amiable the Lord Jesus is.”

Eh, what? Amiable. You know, the real tragedy is not that we don't use that expression the way our fathers used to use it. The real tragedy would be that we didn't know the Lord Jesus in that way.

So come. Come if you are burdened in your service. Come especially if something has gripped your soul that makes your instinct to the Lord be... you see to be such a hard man. And come and find how amiable the Lord Jesus is. And all those things that seem to be duties will become delights.

Yes, it is costly. But it is glorious.

Thank you, incidentally, those of you who were able to pray for me this week when I was speaking to a large conference of ministers in Scotland, many of whom I have known actually 40 years. And as I was speaking to them, as often happens, those of you who speak in public know that suddenly you get two brains. There is the brain that seems to bring the words out and there is the bit of the brain that brings the thoughts in. And just watching these me I remember how as a 14 year old, almost 15 year old boy when I first trusted in Jesus Christ one of the things that constantly nagged away at me was you are going to be one of the few boys in this school who wants to follow Jesus Christ that way. And you are going to lose your friends.

And as I looked on this company and thought of the friendships I have had with many of them over 40 years thought top myself, yes. You use the little, the little life that he has given to you and he piles blessings upon you.

As he said to Peter when Peter said, “No, Lord, we have give up everything. What is going to happen?” And Jesus said, “Look, Peter. I am such an amiable Savior that you will even if there are hardships you will receive 100 fold in this world and in the world to come eternal life.

The amiable Jesus. Let's serve him for his glory.

Our heavenly Father, thank you that you have made the Lord Jesus such a great Savior for us and such a gracious friend. We want to respond to him with all our hearts and to say we do want this man who is the God man to reign over us. We pray this in his name. Amen.