

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 14 December 2003

No. T0296

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The Parables of the Lord Jesus in Luke's Gospel: The Pounds - Luke 19

When the Lord Jesus was a very small boy, an event took place in Judea which had great significance, not only historically and politically, but also morally and spiritually.

Herod, King of Judea, was dying. History records that he had been a very cruel king. Indeed, his horrific act in arranging the slaughter of the young children, when he couldn't find out where the baby Jesus was, caused the evangelist Matthew to recall the words of Jeremiah the prophet. "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, for they are not". Little wonder, then, that he had been much more feared than respected. Perhaps it was what men call poetic justice that he spent his last days wracked with terrible pain. Nevertheless, he was in control of his senses until the end. While he lay in bed, awaiting death, one of his attendants brought to his attention the fact that some of his more outspoken subjects had been heard to say about him, "There'll be no tears shed when **he** dies". "**Oh,**" thought Herod, "we'll see about that". He arranged that, when his death was known to be imminent, members of certain socially high-ranking families in the province of Judea should be gathered together. Then, when his death actually occurred, they should all be herded together, into the public stadium in Jerusalem, and put to death coincident with the announcement of his death. In this way, he ensured that there would indeed be tears shed when he died, if not for him, personally, certainly for those who had died innocently, at his command.

Many would think that the slaughter Herod arranged, for when he himself died, would be a further fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Scripture, as ever, anticipates men's thoughts.

Before Herod died, he nominated Archelaus, one of his sons, to be his successor. This was standard practice at the time. Now, while Herod carried the title King, he only held this at the behest of Caesar, the Roman Emperor. Archelaus, to have his appointment as King confirmed, had to go to Rome to receive the seals of office from Caesar himself. No doubt, he would have to swear allegiance to Rome when he did so. So, he proceeded to Rome with his retinue of courtiers and officials for this to be done. When they became aware of this, some of the most prominent citizens of Jerusalem and Judea hurried to Rome. Their object was to anticipate the arrival of Archelaus and to deliver to Caesar an important message. "This man is a terrible person. We won't have **him** to reign over **us**". However, having heard both sides of the story, Caesar proceeded to appoint Archelaus, but with restricted dignity and powers. Obviously, Archelaus and his supporters were extremely annoyed at all this. When they got back to Jerusalem, and with his new-found authority, Archelaus took his revenge on those who had opposed his appointment, demonstrating that he was no less cruel than his father. He dealt most cruelly with those who had opposed his succession to the throne, and rewarded those who were faithful to him.

Thirty years later, all this was still recent history and well known to the minds of the inhabitants of Judea. Against this background, the Lord Jesus told the parable of the pounds.

Luke is the only Evangelist who records this parable, in Luke 19:11-27. Please read it again as soon as you can. Luke gives two reasons for the parable's relevance. He says, 'Jesus spake a parable, **because** He was nigh unto Jerusalem, and **because** the disciples thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear.' Let us think about those two reasons, one at a time. They are connected, but distinct.

The disciples were convinced that their Lord and Master was the long-promised Messiah. They had no doubt at all that His ministry would come to a climax in His setting up His Kingdom on earth, with Jerusalem as the capital city. In so doing, He would bring to an end the long period of subservience to Gentile powers which was so obnoxious to the proud Jewish people. Their present subjugation to the Roman Empire, with Rome as the capital of that vast empire, was a constant reminder to them of their sorry plight.

They were approaching Jerusalem. Their present proximity to 'the city of the great king', as it is spoken about in Psalm 48, would convince them that the time of their deliverance had arrived. The tension was rising day by day. They would be convinced that their Master would announce in Jerusalem that He had come to overthrow their enemies, assume power, and set up the everlasting kingdom they had read about in the writings of the prophets. In expression of this expectation, 'they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear', or come into public

display. In their minds, it all fitted together. The time had arrived. The long period of national sorrow, suffering and disgrace would soon be over. The conversion of Zacchaeus and the radical change in his life-style, the record of which immediately precedes the parable, would appear to confirm their hopes. The Lord's own comment that "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" would bolster that feeling. We can understand how excited the disciples would be. It was therefore necessary for the Lord Jesus to warn them that before Christ would or could reign, He must be rejected by His own people, suffer abuse, even death. He would then be raised from the dead, and go to heaven for a further waiting period, before their hopes would or could be realised. This was not the first time that the Lord had warned them of this, but it either didn't penetrate their minds, or they simply didn't want to hear it.

It had also, already, been necessary for the Lord Jesus to tell the Pharisees, who were very concerned about keeping up good appearances, that the kingdom of God was not, at the moment, one of outward show (17:20).

There can be no reasonable doubt that the nobleman of the parable, the man of noble birth, who went to a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, is intended to be a picture of the Lord Jesus Himself. He has gone to heaven, to await the time when He will return and set up His kingdom, having received it formally from God the Father. Quite clearly, in this respect there was to be an interval between His going away and His coming back. While the parable alludes directly or indirectly to both Archelaus and the Lord Jesus, there is, of course, this tremendous difference. Archelaus fulfilled the parable in a bad, evil way. The Lord Jesus will answer to the parable in a very good way.

It is just as clear that the servants are a picture of His disciples, who are, themselves, an indication of those, including ourselves, who since then have expressed our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ by confessing Him as Lord. Having done so, we are responsible to act for Him, as His representatives, while we wait for Him to come back again.

The citizens represent the Jewish nation, as such. It was no exaggeration for the Lord to say in the parable that the citizens of the nobleman **hated** him. Those who knew the facts about Archelaus would undoubtedly say, "No wonder!" But the Lord had to tell the disciples that the Jewish people would just as surely hate Himself, Who only had blessing in mind for them. As we read in John 1, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." But, they would not only reject Him when He presented Himself to them as their long-promised Messiah. After His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, they would likewise send a further confirmatory message after Him. That message would be, "We will not have **this** man to reign over us." How would they send such a message? They would martyr those servants of Christ who preached the gospel of the grace of God to them from the day of Pentecost onwards. In particular, by arresting and stoning Stephen, as recorded in Acts 6 and 7, they were virtually saying to the Lord Jesus, "We haven't changed our minds **one** little bit since we **crucified** you. We **still** don't want you." Those who knew their scriptures, what we speak of as the Old Testament, would be reminded of the prophetic statement in Psalm 69:4, "They hated me without a cause".

The Lord then proceeded to develop the detail of the parable. There were **ten** servants. Why **ten**? It's one of those things you can skip over for many years, then once you've noticed it, it jumps out of the page at you wherever you look. Consistently, throughout the Bible, the number **ten** is brought in when **responsibility** is under consideration. Man is a creature responsible to God for his every action, word or thought. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the number **ten** comes so often into the text when man's responsibility is at stake. To proceed, each of **ten** servants receives **one** pound. Each servant is made to realise that he is equally, personally and individually responsible to his master as steward of whatever has been entrusted to his care.

In Luke 2:49 we read that even when the Lord Jesus was as young as twelve, he explained to Joseph and Mary, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" His life on earth was spent in devoted service to His Father in heaven. Similarly, we Christians should devote our lives on **earth** to being busy in **His** service. We are to represent **Him** on earth while He is in heaven, as He on earth represented His Father Who was in heaven.

Added urgency was given to the message by the added phrase, "till I come". The servants were not given a specific time for the master's return. They were given a job to do for him in his absence. They knew that he was coming back. In the meantime, they had to get on with his business, knowing that he might come back at any time. The exact moment was unknown to them, but he would come back, of that there was no doubt. They could be absolutely sure. He had said so.

What a lovely picture of the present position of the Christian! What a sharp challenge! Saved by the precious blood of Jesus! Ready for heaven while living on earth! Saved to serve, until the Master's return! There is so much to do, and so little time in which to do it. However, for the moment, back to the parable.

Verse 15 reads, "And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading."

The time for the review of the servants' stewardship had come. Three test cases are examined. They are samples of the kind of response that arises when servants are given responsibilities, or conversely, are given the opportunity to act on their master's behalf. It isn't necessary to examine all ten in detail to get a comprehensive picture, or to learn the necessary lessons.

Again, the very words are a picture of what will happen when the Lord Jesus reviews the service of each Christian believer at the judgment seat of Christ. "He commanded!" He certainly will! "That He might know!" Of course He does! He knows everything! He doesn't need to ask to find out. But the servant needs to know that the master knows. He needs to be made to feel his own responsibility.

The first servant had earned ten pounds with the one pound committed to him. He was aware that the pound was not His own. At his appraisal, he speaks to his master of 'thy pound'. Conscious of that, he had used it, as well as he was able, to promote the interests of his master. The master commended the servant. He had been faithful in respect of what was relatively very little. Because of that, he would be given greater responsibility. Doing a small job well proved he was fit to be given a bigger job. When the kingdom was finally set up, he would be given administrative responsibility for **ten** cities.

The servant who had gained **five** pounds was similarly commended and rewarded. He had similar understanding of his responsibility to trade well with his master's pound. "**Thy** pound has gained **five** pounds." Likewise, the master's assessment was, "Thou hast done well. Thou hast been faithful. You shall have responsibility over **five** cities."

The **third** example is very much different. This servant hadn't traded **at all**. He had wrapped up, in a cloth, the pound allocated to him and hidden it to keep it safe. His excuse was futile. He said he knew that his master was a harsh, unforgiving man who would make no allowances for anything less than total success. For that reason, he hadn't dared to enter into trade with it. "There it is", he said, "you can have it back, just as you gave it to me. No harm done." Oh, dear! In so doing, and so saying, he merely showed that he didn't really know his master at all. Think of it. If his assessment of his master **was** accurate, surely he wouldn't have **dared** to act as he had. He would have done his **utmost** to show a profit in what the master had given him to do. As always in such cases, the master took the servant at his own word. "Alright," he said. "In your estimation, I am a hard taskmaster. I will take you at your own word. I will accept your own assessment of me. I will judge you by your own standards. If what you say is right, **why** did you not, at the very **least**, invest the money in the **bank**, so that I would receive interest on the capital? You are clearly totally unfit to be given any responsibility at all. The pound previously given to **you** will now be transferred to someone who knows me better, and will serve me more faithfully. Take it from him", he instructed, "and give it to the servant who has built up his pound to ten on my behalf." "But, master", protested some of those servants, "**that** one has ten **already**". "That's the whole **point**", said the master, "I gave him **one**. **He** has made that up into **ten**. Of **course** he is the right one to be given more." And so passed into common usage the telling observation, "To him that hath shall be given. To him that hath not shall be taken away what he hath". On first hearing, it sounds a bit of a conundrum. When you think about it, it is perfectly plain. To the servant who had used his opportunity well, more, or greater, opportunities would rightly be given. The servant, who had done nothing at all with his opportunity to serve the master, had demonstrated that he wasn't fit to be given **any** opportunity **at all**. Isn't it **right**? Isn't it **fair**? Doing a job well demonstrates the capacity to take on more responsibility. Making a mess of a first, small job gives no confidence that more responsibility should be given to such a servant.

The parable ends, as so many do, with a final word of caution. There will be a final day of judgment. When that day comes for you and me, dear Christian friend, where will **we** stand? As in the parable, the Lord Jesus Christ will come again to receive for Himself a kingdom. How can we be sure? God has said so, in His word. "God has appointed a day, in the which He will rule the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained, whereof He has given assurance unto all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

We don't know the day, or the hour, but come He will. In the meantime, let us work faithfully for Him while we wait for Him to come. But is there enough work to do to keep every committed Christian busily occupied until the coming of the Lord? Assuredly! Listen to the words of Elsie Duncan Yale.

*There's a work for Jesus ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.
Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;
There's a work for Jesus, none but you can do.*

*There's a work for Jesus, humble though it be,
'Tis the very service He would ask of thee.
Go where fields are whitened, and the labourers few;
There's a work for Jesus, none but you can do.*

*There's a work for Jesus, precious souls to bring,
Tell them of His mercies, tell them of your King.
Faint not, grow not weary, He will strength renew;
There's a work for Jesus, none but you can do.*

*Work for Jesus, day by day,
Serve Him ever, falter never, Christ obey.
Yield Him service, loyal, true:
There's a work for Jesus none but you can do.*

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