

The Parable of the Gold Coins – Luke 19v11-27

¹¹ While the people were listening to this, Jesus continued and told them a parable. He was now almost at Jerusalem, and they supposed that the Kingdom of God was just about to appear. ¹² So he said, “There was once a man of high rank who was going to a country far away to be made king, after which he planned to come back home. ¹³ Before he left, he called his ten servants and gave them each a gold coin and told them, ‘See what you can earn with this while I am gone.’ ¹⁴ Now, his own people hated him, and so they sent messengers after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ ¹⁵ “The man was made king and came back. At once he ordered his servants to appear before him, in order to find out how much they had earned. ¹⁶ The first one came and said, ‘Sir, I have earned ten gold coins with the one you gave me.’ ¹⁷ ‘Well done,’ he said; ‘you are a good servant! Since you were faithful in small matters, I will put you in charge of ten cities.’ ¹⁸ The second servant came and said, ‘Sir, I have earned five gold coins with the one you gave me.’ ¹⁹ To this one he said, ‘You will be in charge of five cities.’ ²⁰ Another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your gold coin; I kept it hidden in a handkerchief. ²¹ I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take what is not yours and reap what you did not plant.’ ²² He said to him, ‘You bad servant! I will use your own words to condemn you! You know that I am a hard man, taking what is not mine and reaping what I have not planted. ²³ Well, then, why didn’t you put my money in the bank? Then I would have received it back with interest when I returned.’ ²⁴ Then he said to those who were standing there, ‘Take the gold coin away from him and give it to the servant who has ten coins.’ ²⁵ But they said to him, ‘Sir, he already has ten coins!’ ²⁶ ‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘that to those who have something, even more will be given; but those who have nothing, even the little that they have will be taken away from them.’ ²⁷ Now, as for those enemies of mine who did not want me to be their king, bring them here and kill them in my presence!”

2 Samuel 7v11b-14a. The words of the prophet Nathan to David: - “The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will *establish a house for you*: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up *your offspring to succeed you*, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and *I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*. ¹⁴ *I will be his father, and he will be my son.*

The Parable of the gold coins.

Backing the right candidate?

As a teenager I listened to a lot of Punk Rock music. The Punk Singer Tom Robinson sang the words ‘If Left is right, then Right is wrong, you’d better decide which side you’re on’

It’s important to be on the right side but who will I support? Have you ever supported a side or a person that you were convinced would win, but they lost. There were many in Scotland who fervently believed Alex Salmon would lead them to Independent glory, only to see him resign when he lost the vote. But what if there had been a cost to getting it wrong. Those who supported Independence had their taxes doubled ! What if your Boss leaves work, and you have to express your support for one of the two possible replacements, but you know that if the other one wins, then you’ll be out the door within a year. I had a colleague Thong once who came from Vietnam. He had to choose which side – the communists supported by China & Russia, or the anti-communists supported by the US and the West. You had to choose and wear your colours. You may have no preference, but you could not sit on the fence.. Thong and his family chose the anti-communist South and when they lost, he had to pay the penalty for choosing the wrong side. Destined for a Prison camp., he escaped with his family, amongst the famous Vietnamese boat people, nearly a million fled the country in small boats over several years.

A Good King

Having a good ruler or a good boss is important to your life, i.e. you want a good and strong leader, some-one that will take you in the right direction and do good by you. In the Old Testament God wanted to lead the Jewish people by use of Holy Judges, but they wanted Kings. So God gave them Saul, then David (of Goliath fame) who was their greatest one ever, and the nation has never been so big and powerful as

under David. Despite his personal failings he had a passionate love for God for which he was rewarded. His Son King Solomon built the Temple but used forced labour from the Northern tribes to do so, and Davids grandchildren were even harder on the Northern tribes, and the nation divided in two. Then it got worse, with invasions, exile and the destruction of the temple. Eventually the people returned and the temple was rebuilt, but they had never had another King like David. Yet there was a promise of one to come. Davids prophet Nathan told David that there one future day there would be a King from his line, who will be so close to God they will be like Father and son and he will establish a throne and kingdom that would last forever (2 Samuel 7v11b-14a). He will be like a God-king, when he rules it will be like God himself is on the throne. That was the prophecy, about 1000 BC.

Rubbish Kings

A thousand years later, there was a growing expectation for the return of the King, both from the followers of Jesus and the Religious rulers. The Jews had suffered from some rubbish kings, which had heightened their desire to see the return of the God-King, a true successor to King David. Things could not get much worse than they were on the King front, as the Herods that were now in charge under the Romans, were not from the line of David, and they were not even seen as proper Jews.

In 4BC, Herod the Great dies, and appoints 3 youngest sons to succeed him over different parts of his kingdom. Herod Archelaus had Jerusalem and the region of Judea in his area which should have made him King of the Jews, but under Roman rule this would first need to be agreed by Caesar. In his first Passover, to retaliate over attacks on his men, Archelaus sent his entire army into the temple to massacre the 3000 worshippers there. Not a great way of winning a popularity contest. He was not even officially in charge. Archelaus then had to journey to Rome to get his kingship made official by Caesar Augustus. However due to his gross unpopularity, a delegation went before him to argue against him being King including some of his own family. He returned as ruler but Caesar would not give him the title of King until he had proven himself worthy of it. If you had been a verbal support of his opposition you would not have been pleased when he returned in power. Ten years later he had to make the same journey again, and was hoping to claim the title of King, but this time he was arrested and exiled to Gaul (now France & Belgium), and he never returned.

Context of Jesus

This understanding of Kings sets the background for the parable, and at the time of its telling, Jesus was in his last few days heading to Jerusalem for the Passover. On route he has come to Jericho, and is met at the gate by a blind man shouting Have Mercy on me 'Son of David', a messianic title that aligned Jesus with the Nathan prophecy. He accepts the title and gives sight to the blind man. The large crowd now following him saw another miracle as Jesus transforms the life of the most despised man in the region, the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus.

Jericho is only 17 miles from Jerusalem so the journey is nearly over. Some of his followers were thinking this is it. Jesus is about to be crowned King. Jesus is talking about the kingdom coming and he is the Son of David the God-King. Jesus will go to Jerusalem, it will all come to a mighty climax, the power of God will come over the people, they will conquer the Romans, and put Jesus on the throne in Jerusalem. Then the disciples, his followers will get great rewards and have an easy life!

There was indeed to be a climax, but not the one they were inspecting and in this parable Jesus is telling his disciples that he will not be King immediately, he has to be gone a while first, and there are expectations on them whilst he is away.

The nobleman becomes King

Jesus tells the parable about a Nobleman who becomes King, and about his servants.

The nobleman goes on a journey. There is no immediate kingship here in his land. He has to travel to a far country to make a claim for his kingship, which implies he will be away a long time. Whilst he is away there will be some uncertainty as to when he will return (if at all), and when he does if he will have been made King or not. He may be exiled and never return.

So the setting of this parable would be familiar to the listener. A nobleman is disappearing for a period to a distant place, but is expecting to return as King. He had a lot of people who did not want him to be King. They hated him, and did what they could to get rid of him sending messengers to harm his case.

Whilst the setting would be a familiar one to the listeners, there is no link between this nobleman who is the God figure in this story and the wicked Herod Archelaus. In the Bible when a story is told of a King and his servants, then the listener will immediately think of God and his chosen people, the Jews. They will identify as Gods servants. So the right interpretation is that when Jesus makes reference to the Nobleman who becomes King, he is making reference to himself, either now or in the future.

The Gifts

Ten servants are each given a 'gold coin'. Some say this was equivalent to 100 days wages, other say a lot less. But it was enough money to do something decent with, and yet still a reasonably modest amount for a rich nobleman to give out. He asked them to use the money to engage in trade whilst he was away. See what you can do with my gift, see how well you get on with it.

Despite the protestation of his enemies, the nobleman returns as King, and a couple of servants are eager to share what they have been doing in his name.

Held to account

Whilst the nobleman is away, there is an uncertainty on who will win, the nobleman or his enemies. In transacting for the nobleman, the servants will have faced opposition from his enemies. The first servant is keen to show the Nobleman that he has been very busy transacting on his behalf, and **his** gift of a gold coin had earned ten times that in return. The second servants return as not as impressive, but he was still glad to show his Master a 500% return in the short time he had been away. When you compare that to UK interest rates on your savings of half a percent, it was very good going.

The servants are quick not to take credit. They don't claim to be great gifted entrepreneurs. The first tells the King your gold coin has earned me ten more. It is your gift that did it, I just faithfully went about business in your name openly and consistently. It was your gift that produced more of itself.

The nobleman says to them you have been faithful in small things. The servants are rewarded primarily for their faithfulness, not for their success. What is **most** important to the Master is how many transactions they have undertaken in his name, more than how much they made from them.

Growing up, I knew of people who kept a book or Leger to record all their transactions and dealings. My Grocer, Mr Hoskins, always wrote each sale done in a book – he wrote slowly and carefully and it took him ages to serve us! If there were 2 or 3 people in front of you in the queue, it was going to take a good ten

minutes. I imagine the King in the parable wanting to look at their ledger, to see how much of His business they had done in His name, in the presence of his enemies.

This is a test for the servants. It will be easy for them to stick up for their master and run successful businesses in his name if and when he returns as King, but very much harder before hand, whilst waiting for his return, with doubts creeping in, and surrounded by his enemies. It is in that situation where you prove your loyalty. In this parable the Master challenges his servants, to live boldly and publically as his servants using his resources, unafraid of his enemies, confident that the future will be his future.

After communism failed, when the Church in Latvia appointed new pastors, they would ask – When were you baptised? If the answer was during the communist rule, then their commitment was assured and fewer further questions were needed.

There is a day of reckoning. Jesus returns to Jerusalem, but what does the God-King find on his return. Many enemies that don't want him to be their promised King, or Messiah. Does he find in the temple a holy place of prayer, or a den of thieves?

Rewards

The reward is not an easy life putting your feet up, but is an opportunity to show your faithfulness and aptitude on a bigger stage. You have done well. Now in my kingdom you can look after 10 cities. A big promotion with all the responsibilities and benefits that go with it. And for you 5 cities. They have been faithful in small things, they can now be trusted with bigger things.

The third servant.

There were 10 servants who got a gold coin, but only three are mentioned. Not that it matters, because there are only two actual outcomes, those who are faithful to their master in what he asks them to do, and those who are not. A servant of the master, he was given the same amount as the others and expected to go about transacting business in his Master's name. The case was not this man had indeed put the effort in, but had just ended up doing badly and losing his profit. He wrapped the gold coin in a handkerchief and did nothing! To keep something valuable in a hanky would be recognised as an insult. He could have at least deposited with the money-lenders, or the temple treasury, or even kept it at home in a strong-box. Not that any of that really matters, the main point is that he did nothing with the gift.

So what **did** the third servant do when the nobleman was away. Why didn't he at least try. Why, because he chose to be on a different side. He did not want to be doing the Nobleman's business because he wanted to be accepted by his masters enemies. He did not want to be closely associated with the Nobleman by openly doing business in his name, because he did not think his Master would return as King. The Masters opponents were strong enemies, they would end up having their own ruler, and he would then find his place with them. To openly transact in his Masters name would only cause him trouble with the enemies. So he did nothing. 'If Left is right, then Right is wrong, you gotta decide which side your on' – He chose the wrong side.

He then had to think quickly when his Master did return as King and found that he had done nothing. Whilst to some the words he used might seem an insult, to other they would be great praise. He came up with an excuse which he though would flatter his Master and get him off the hook. He heralded him as a merciless raider, one to be feared, and he didn't want to let down such a formidable man by losing his money. The Gauls thought it a disgrace to grow your own crops when you could raid some-on else's crops, and a Bedouin

chieftain would take these words as a compliment to a great plunderer. Even King David sanctioned raids on his enemies as an acceptable economic enterprise. However the supposed compliment was actually an insult to his Master.

The faithful servants knew the true nature of the Master and realised that he would expect them to go about their work in his Name. The unfaithful servant did not. He was too ashamed to stand up for his Master, and wanted to keep in with their enemies. His ledger book was empty.

The Nobleman dressed him down, and let and turned his words back on him. His punishment is to let him stay with that distorted image of his nature and to take away his gold coins. There was no value to the Master in him having even this small amount, as he had not proven himself capable of doing anything with it. Whereas the faithful servant who had made 10 times the original value had proved he could transact profitable business with a small amount, so he was given the third servant's coin.

Perhaps the third servant is a bit like someone who you have known for many years at work, and one day you get an opportunity to share Jesus, but you get the response – I am already a Christian, I got baptised as a teenager 20 years ago. I still go to Church now and again. But it becomes clear, they have never shared their faith with anyone, it's all kept very quiet outside of Church. You ask them about it, and the response is – Faith is a personal thing, I let others believe what they want too. Sharing the Gospel, that's the job of a vicar etc. He may have been baptised, and effectively be saved by Jesus, but he is not transacting Jesus at all. He is not given any new spiritual gifts, because he won't make any use of them. He'll wrap it up in a hanky. Just as well as give the gift, or the blessing to someone else who will make the most of it.

Give to the man who already has?

What a statement, and how easily this has been misquoted and misunderstood. "I tell you that the man who has something will get more given to him. But as for the man who has nothing, even his "nothing" will be taken away". If taken out of context this is a terrible saying, it could mean – the rich will get richer, and the poor will get poorer. However taken in the context of the parable it makes perfect sense. This is about stewardship, making good use of the gifts that you receive from Jesus. Look at it in context. The man who has abundance in this story, has it because he has made good use of the little he has. He has made a lot out of a little, so he is likely to keep getting more. At work, there is often an adage – if you want something done give it to a busy person. Why – because you know he will keep working diligently and get the job done even though he has a lot on. Whereas the man from the next pen who is chatting away in the coffee shop and seems to be less busy, will no doubt never find the time to get around to your job, it will sit in his inbox next to other jobs he was asked to do.

Imagine God said to three people I am going to bless you with the gift of healing. In one year, the first Christian sees 100 miraculous healings from his gift, and the second sees 50 people healed. The third person does not go and pray for anyone. At the end of year appraisal, God decides that it is a waste of time leaving the gift with the third Christian for another year, so he takes it from him and uses it to double the blessing on the first person, who then goes out and heals 200 people the next year!

The servants who were faithful in small things, having proven themselves, now get a chance to be faithful with much bigger things, and see even more rewards.

What have you got from Jesus. What resources do you have? What talents have you got? What spiritual gifts has he given you. How often are you using these things for going about the business of your Master Jesus, of caring for the poor, his business of sharing the Gospel, for extending God's kingdom.

It's like Jesus is saying, you've done well this year, you've come faithfully to prayer meetings, you've openly shared me at work, you've given generously when you see a real need, and you've had a go at laying hands on the sick and praying, with some success. You've done a good job for me this year, but stay in there faithful one, cause next year we're taking this thing to a whole new level. A point of caution though we do not earn more blessings or responsibilities, we should not expect anything from our service. However it is true that for most people who are recognised as having powerful and high profile ministries would have first proven themselves with small things.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you choose to be a servant, to do his Will. All that you get from Him, is a gift, it is all from Grace, you have not earned any of it as wages. So there are no guarantees of rewards and blessing. But there is a general truth here that those who have been entrusted with much, started off by being entrusted by a small amount and proving themselves faithful in the smaller gifts first.

Enemies in trouble

"And as for these enemies of mine who objected to my being their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence". Lets be clear this is not the lazy servant who is threatened with execution, but those who have opposed the nobleman, who did not want him as their King and tried to bring him down.

The Pharisees wanted to see the God-king take up his throne in Jerusalem. Their hopes were in a mighty warrior of a Messiah, that would sweep away the Romans as he established the new great Kingdom for the Jews, one that would never end. They did not want Jesus as the God-King, he might be the common persons choice, but he certainly wasn't the choice of them or the other religious rulers. When he enters Jerusalem for the Passover, his enemies will be there waiting for him, and they will make sure he does not become King.

And yet there is still hope for his enemies. In the Middle East, No is not an answer, it is a pause in the negotiations. In the West, if our Boss says you are fired, I want you to have your desk cleared by lunch-time, then you start packing your things. If you hear this in the Middle East, it means your boss is really not happy with you and you have some long negotiations ahead, and need help from some influential friends, because this has become a very serious matter which deserves your immediate attention.

Jesus taught us to love our enemies and this is not in contrast to that command.

This parable, like so many of them is left unfinished. The new King requests that his enemies are brought to him and executed, but it does not say that this then happens. It is though a stern warning to say that conscious, active and determined opposition to the Master is taken very seriously.

There is still time for them to repent, and some Pharisees did, even Saul of Tarsas, became the apostle Paul, but time is running out for them. Their opposition to Jesus is serious.

Then when you see this parable through the 'end-times' lens the enemies of Jesus are facing the final judgement for what they have done.

Conclusion

We have one life. We need to decide which side we are in and then go for it, even if we are surrounded by those who despise Jesus, and mock our faith. If we choose Jesus, then though we are saved by Grace not by works, we are still expected to play our part in bringing in his kingdom – he told us to go and make disciples. We are saved by Grace, by God love shown on the cross, but when we align ourselves as his followers, his disciples, his servants, then we have work to do diligently for him. We are not called to serve, we are called to be servants. We are to transact Jesus, do business in his name, even though we may have his opposition all

around us, those who are atheists, of other faith, or who might mock us out of ignorance, or deny us our rights or freedom. We can draw strength from our Christian brothers and Sisters in countries where sharing the name of Jesus is illegal, who despite the great difficulties and enemies they face, still find ways of transacting Jesus and being faithful to him.

Jesus will come again, what will he find then? If he comes tomorrow what will we, his present day servants have to show him in our accounts book, our ledger. What have we been transacting in his name. In other words how many others have we loved in his name, prayed for, shared the Gospel with. What names are in your book. It is not about how successful you've been with them, but have you been trying, and how frequently?

How do we transact Jesus, by praying, by giving, by loving, but also making the most of the talents, resources and gifts that he has given us, in particular the Holy Spirit. How busy are we about his work, how many entries are in our ledger. We should acknowledge that the results we see from using our gifts are because of the Giver not anything we have done in our own strength. Everything we have and all our blessings come from the Grace of God, nothing is earned, or guaranteed. Yet as we are faithful in the small things, then we offer ourselves as candidates to be entrusted with more, and to see even greater blessings. He can take us to a new level.

Do we desire that in this church, to see more answered prayer, more healing, more people coming to know Jesus. Do we want to see this Church taken to a new level, then we need to be faithful with what he has already given us, and be busy about his work, transacting Jesus, on a daily basis.

Amen