

Servants of the Once and Future King
Luke 19:11-27
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Read Luke 19:11-27

"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times." (Psalm 12:6)

Introduction

At one point in time, I thought about going into finance as a career. I actually got about a third of the way through an online MBA, but I continued to feel called to ministry, so I have never switched careers. But I've learned how to speak some of the finance language and understand just enough to be dangerous. As I'm sure you're aware, there are various ways that you can invest your money depending on what your goals are, how much return you're looking for, and how much risk you can tolerate. Keep in mind that I'm far from an expert, but this is how I understand some of the investing options out there. (I know you're all used to my money sermons being about generosity and against hoarding, about refusing to bow to it as an idol; so this will be a little different):

- You can just put money in a savings account and make pennies of interest. That's really just a step up from putting the money under your mattress.

- A 5-year CD (Certificate of Deposit) could get you up to 2.5% interest right now.

- A step up from CDs would be bonds. On Friday, 5-year US Treasury bonds were at 2.95%.

Both CDs and bonds have different timelines that you can tie up your money – longer = higher %.

- You can invest in individual stocks or a collection of stocks such as mutual funds. Your investment will go up when the price of the stock or fund goes up and will go down when the price goes down. Your risk tolerance, your ability to choose quality stocks or to diversify, and your timing of the market all play a role in how much money you make. Many advisors tell you, especially if you're young enough to ride out the market to "set it and forget it." Others say to rebalance or reinvest often.

- You can invest in real estate and either buy a house while it's priced low, fix it up, and sell it when its value has improved; the classic "flipping a house." Or you can buy an investment property to rent out to a family or a business so that you have monthly income on your investment.

- There are thousands of other financial products, and you can get involved in the wild west of crypto-currency, or wade through the alphabet soup of ETFs, REITs, SIAs, IPOs, and all those acronyms, depending on your goals and needs. Again, don't take investing advice from me, except that I think everyone over the age of 18 should be funding a Roth IRA every year you can afford to put money into it, so you have tax-free money in your later years.

Today's Scripture passage is about an investor of sorts with lots of money who chose the people who worked for him to invest his money. He gave money to servants of varying capabilities and went away for a long time, eventually to return and demand an accounting of how each one did with what they were given. Would they invest in business, properties, or financial vehicles that were productive in the intervening years, or would they just bury the money somewhere that they wouldn't lose it, but where it also wouldn't be useful in earning anything? And we'll see that ultimately, this parable is not really about money, but about the Lord's followers being faithful to use what He's given them to see an expansion of His kingdom. The Lord expects us to invest in His kingdom while He is physically absent and His enemies plot against Him. What is your plan, your ministry goals, to use what He's given you to labor on His behalf and get a return on investment?

The first four verses set up the story showing

I. The Servants and Enemies of the King (vv. 11-14)

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. 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.' ¹⁴ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

First, we have to notice why Jesus told this parable: verse 11 tells us that it's because He was getting near Jerusalem and His followers continued to think that He was going to usher in a revolution, a holy coup against Rome any day now. The very first thing that the parable communicated was that the nobleman was going away for a long time before returning. That nobleman represents Jesus. If Jesus had wanted to communicate that He was about to get to work defeating the Romans, He would have talked about the nobleman harnessing his forces and getting ready for battle. But instead, the nobleman was leaving. For what? Verse 12 says *"to receive for himself a kingdom and then return."* Some translations say, *"to have himself appointed king."* He was going to be recognized by the greater governing authority as the king of his country and return with the power to rule. Jesus, likewise, was not bringing the force of the kingdom to bear at that time, but was preparing His disciples for the time when He would be leaving to *"have himself appointed king."* In other words, He would be ascending to heaven to rejoin God the Father and God the Holy Spirit for the rest of human history until He returns again in power at the end of the age. Jesus was verbally sketching out a blueprint of what would happen between His first and second comings.

Now, you might get this parable mixed up with a similar one in Matthew 25 where Jesus said that a Master gave three of his servants ten talents, five talents, and one talent. This one is a little different, he gave ten of his servants the same amount, one mina each. A mina was about three month's wages – so today's equivalent would be maybe \$15,000 or \$20,000. So, be thinking of how someone could invest \$20,000 in a business that would earn money for the king while he was away. The servants represent Jesus' followers, then and now, and throughout church history. We are all given the materials that we need to work with to engage in business for God's kingdom. Will we be diligent to invest them and see a return?

There's a quick note in verse 14 that there were some disgruntled citizens who didn't care for this nobleman. Keep that in the back of your mind, we'll come back to them at the end. The focus is on the servants and their investments. The next five verses show the reason for

II. Rewarding Faithful Servants (vv. 15-19)

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' ¹⁷ 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.' ¹⁸ And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' ¹⁹ And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

When the nobleman who has become a king returned to check on how his servants had done in his absence, he got some initial amazing news. If we take that \$20,000 figure as the amount he left each of them, the first man he checked back with had made a tenfold profit of \$200,000, and the second one had made \$100,000. We don't know how long they had to produce these returns, perhaps several years, but those are such impressive numbers that they were commended: *"Well done, good servant!"* and were given territory to rule over.

That phrase in verse 15 “*when he returned*,” as I said, is pointing to when Jesus will return in His second coming. The Bible calls it “the day of the Lord” or “that great day” or some variation of that to remind us that human history will not go on forever. The Lord has numbered the days that He will continue to allow human beings to live on earth. When He brings that time to a close, He will send Jesus back to gather up His faithful, punish His enemies, and establish His eternal kingdom in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

The servants in the parable all received the same amount of money, just as we’ve all been given the gospel and all the spiritual benefits of salvation. So the question is “what will we do to spread the gospel and see a return on God’s investment?” If God has blessed you with a healthy body, you should be using it to accomplish things that bring Him glory. If God has given you a sharp mind, He will look for how you use your brain to work hard and help others see truth. If God has given you strong financial resources, He is looking for where you’ve shared and leveraged that money for things that can grow the kingdom. All of the spiritual gifts in the Bible – teaching, administration, mercy, prayer, evangelism, etc – are given to His people so that they can benefit and grow His kingdom, or as 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, “*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*”

How do you invest in your most immediate areas: your family, your workplace, your neighborhood? Does your family see your integrity behind closed doors and that your faithfulness to the Lord is not just a Sunday façade? Are you known as a good worker and as a kind and helpful neighbor; or one of those that everyone avoids? How do you invest in this church and in the work of other ministries and missions? These are all good questions to ask yourself, and look for ways to step up. When we invest in the kingdom of God, this parable tells us that God is pleased. We can expect the smile of God, the delight of Jesus in us, and ultimately heavenly rewards. This is not about doing things to earn your salvation, it’s about living your life out of profound gratitude for what Jesus has done for you. When we do works of ministry, not only do we please God, we feel fulfilled. It’s a win-win, giving us great satisfaction.

The Lord will not be pleased with everyone, though, as we see in the last eight verses:

III. Punishing Unproductive Servants and Enemies (vv. 20-27)

²⁰ Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹ 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.’ ²² 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? ²³ Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ ²⁴ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ ²⁵ And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’ ²⁶ ‘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. ²⁷ But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”

The last servant that the king checked in on made zero profit on his \$20,000, essentially shoving the money in his sock drawer so that he would not lose it. He didn’t listen to his boss’ instructions to “*engage in business*” because he was so afraid of what would happen if he lost money. But not doing anything was worse than risking losing the money, apparently. His excuse is that he knew his boss was a severe man... reaping what he did not sow – his solution was to keep the money safe and not risk angering him. He was basically blaming the master for intimidating him. But the master wasn’t having it, he used the man’s own words against him: “knowing I am a severe man, you should have

at least put the money in the bank to earn a little interest.” The punishment: you lose what you have, it’s given to the best income-producer. This last servant is not punished as an enemy, but he gets no reward because he has been disobedient and unproductive.

The implication for us is something along these lines: You can be a Christian who doesn’t risk anything, who never tries to achieve anything for the Lord. Just go about your own business, don’t bother anyone, at night just fall asleep to Netflix or YouTube videos; just rationalize that you’re not hurting anyone, there are professional Christians that get paid to do that all that ministry, let them do it. Is that what you want spiritually out of life? Just to be an unproductive bystander? Or do you want to try some things, risk getting your hands dirty, and step out in faith to see how God will work through your efforts? 1 Corinthians chapter 3 talks about how every believer needs to build upon the foundation of faith that he is given from God. It’s not optional, the Lord will inspect your work; verse 13-15 says, *“Each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”* Do you want to be rewarded because you worked hard for the Lord and the things you did became strong walls in your house of faith? Or do you want to make it into heaven with nothing to show for your efforts here? Do you want God to call you a good servant or a wicked servant? Because that’s how the king addressed his first and last servants. They’re both servants, they’re not his enemies; but one was commended and the other was rebuked. God rewards faithfulness and rebukes the lazy and disobedient!

The final verse talks about the king taking revenge on his enemies. I told you that we’d come back to the citizens that opposed the king. Some people are disturbed by the ending of this parable – the command for the slaughter of the enemies. And what you need to understand is that Jesus seems to have modelled this parable on what happened to Herod the Great’s son, Archelaus. The quick version is that Herod the Great was the ruler of Judea when Jesus was born. The Roman king was Caesar Augustus, Herod ruled under him. When Herod died, Archelaus, his son, assumed the throne. But he had to go to Rome to be recognized and crowned by Caesar. So he left, as the nobleman in the parable did, *“to receive his kingdom.”* Also, like the parable, a large group of citizens, a delegation of 50 Jews and Samaritans went to Rome to argue against his being crowned ruler because he had overseen the slaughter of three thousand Jewish worshippers. The end of the story is that Archelaus was appointed ruler and he came back to Jerusalem ready to punish his enemies. So, when you read v. 27, that the enemies were slaughtered, now you have some context.¹

So, who is Jesus talking about here? These are the people of Jesus’ day (and our day) who do not want Jesus to rule over them. Romans 5, Ephesians 2, and Colossians 1 say that by nature we are enemies of God, and do not want Him as king. Most people who are not Christians would say that they are just neutral towards Jesus, but Jesus would say that if you are not for Me, you are against Me (Luke 11:23). Those who remain God’s enemies will be punished. 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10a teaches what the end will look like with frightening clarity: *“...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...”* God is all-powerful, able to strike down anyone He chooses. No one can stop the day of His vengeance, no one can withstand His wrath.

¹ Philip Ryken, *Luke, Volume 2* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), pp. 315-16.

If you don't know God, if you don't follow Jesus, this parable says that you need to be reconciled to Him or face eternal judgment. If you don't know what that means, I would love to talk to you about it, come find me later. If you are a Christian but never use your gifts or lift a finger to advance His kingdom or obey Him, this parable says, "start now." Start figuring out how to invest in the world the resources that He's given you. You know, there are many metaphors for who we are as followers of Christ: we're the bride of Christ together, we're His children, we're priests, we're ambassadors, and we're servants. If you're a servant, you need to serve. Search the New Testament for His will for you contained in His directives to you, and go do them. But at the same time you're a son or daughter, and God will not disown you. So keep those truths at the same time, those identities go hand-in-hand as you live your life for your Father and Master.

Conclusion

Sometimes it seems like there's never a perfect time to serve Jesus and use your gifts. When you're a kid or a teenager growing up in church, you don't feel qualified to do things for God until you're older. Then when you're an adult, you're too busy working and raising a family; it's hard to squeeze in extra events and commitments. Then when you retire, it's time to relax and reflect, decompress after decades of grinding work, so you play golf and pickleball, tour wineries, and have "me" time; let the younger people run the ministries. If you identify with any of that line of thinking, I want to challenge you that every one of those stages is actually a wonderful time to serve the Lord. When you're young, you have energy and youthful ability to reflect Jesus. When you're a working adult, you're part of running businesses and groups where you can influence a lot of people and can be salt and light in strategic places. When you're an empty-nester or retired, you have much more time to invest in kingdom work and people's lives. I believe in retiring from careers when it's appropriate, but I do not believe in retiring from serving the Lord; that should last our whole lives.

I went to the Smyrna-Clayton Mayor's Prayer Breakfast in back in the fall. A man named Dennis spoke. He was born with no arms and the doctors told his parents to give him up for adoption because it was going to be too hard, they had no idea what they were in for. And people throughout Dennis' growing up years advised his parents to lower the bar of what they expected from him, to just make life comfortable for him. Thankfully, his parents ignored all of that advise. They set a bowl of ice cream with a spoon in front of him when he was a small child. And basically, if he wanted the ice cream, he had to figure it out. That sounds cruel, but he learned how to use a spoon with his toes. They assigned him chores just like his brother who had arms, so he learned how to mow the lawn and even use the weed-eater with his legs. When he goes into stores to pay for something, he keeps his money in his shoe and lifts his credit card out with his foot and swipes it. Does he resent his parents for making him do all that work? No, one of his main points was that he was grateful that his parents made him learn how to live life and raised the bar; otherwise, he would not be an independent adult who got married, has two sons, drives a car, graduated from college where he had a full scholarship, and is a full-time pastor and speaker.

I went away from that breakfast asking myself why I make any excuses for myself, why I shy away from really hard things. And as your pastor, I don't want to lower the bar that Jesus set for us: He has given us everything we need to be a productive servant and He expects diligence and obedience as we faithfully live our lives. So get involved in ministries, take a risk and invite that neighbor over for a meal, parents: labor to disciple your children, children: honor and obey your parents, give generously to those in need and to ministries that are doing God's work, study the Bible on your own and continue to grow in your understanding, go on a mission trip, plant seeds of faith wherever you are... These are all just suggested applications, it's not a list you have to accomplish. Each of us

should ask the Lord what being a faithful servant looks like for us, and for the strength to accomplish it.

Yes, there is eternal punishment for those who remain God's enemies all the way to death. But there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1 tells us. God's wrath was turned away from His people because it was poured out on His own Son on the cross. So the Christian who dies clothed in the righteousness of Christ will not be punished. Instead we will receive a reward for the ways that we served Him. And I, for one, want to please my heavenly Father. Remember, nothing I do will earn salvation; Christ is the one who earned that. But after we are saved, God wants to see faithful service, He wants us to invest our mina and see His kingdom grow.

➔ Transition to Communion: The table of the Lord is a reminder of what God did in the past to save us, but also a reminder of the future that's coming.

Benediction - Numbers 6:24-26 - *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."*