

The Church Age

Luke 19:11-27

Series: The Journey to Jerusalem (Luke, Fall 2019)

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Worship: Christ the Lord of the Church

Key Sentence: Until the King comes, good stewards wisely invest his resources

Outline:

I. The King is Coming (11-15 and 27)

II. Invest Until He Comes (13 and 15-26)

Luke 19:11-27 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. ¹²He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ ¹⁴But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ ¹⁵When 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. ¹⁶The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ ¹⁷And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ ¹⁸And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ ¹⁹And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ ²⁰Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹for 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.’ ²²He 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? ²³Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ ²⁴And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ ²⁵And 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. ²⁷But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”

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Have you ever done any investing? You know, playing the stock market, buying mutual funds, buying bonds, or Certificates of Deposit? If you've done it you know, and if you haven't you should know, that one of the key questions you ask yourself in investing is "How much risk am I willing to take?" Every investment carries a certain risk. You can lose or you can gain. In general, the greater the risk the greater the potential return. You can more easily lose your investment, but if you gain, it will be a larger amount. That's why mutual fund companies offer so many alternatives. Their income fund invests in dividend paying stocks and bonds. The philosophy is low risk, but usually lower return. Another fund is growth and income, where they invest in companies with higher risk but the potential for growth. Then they will have one called development, that invests in small growing companies. They'll say in the prospectus that it is above average risk and opportunity. Or you can take the ultimate risk and invest in one company you think is going to fly. Those who bought Amazon at \$18 or Microsoft at \$21 per share are very wealthy now.

So, as an investor, you have to answer the risk question: "Will I invest in something very risky, with the potential to make a bundle, or something very safe, where I won't lose anything?" Of course, my frustration over the years is that I seem to invest in things that are very sensitive to any downturn in the market, but very bad at following the market into recovery or growth. I highly recommend that you do not ask me for investment advice. Except in one area. As we look at our text in Luke today, I want to point out that you are also making decisions about investing kingdom resources. We're going to see today that until the King comes, good stewards wisely invest his resources. I highly recommend that you do invest yourself in the work of the coming king.

Our text is Luke chapter 19, verses 11 to 27. This is the last text that describes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Next week he arrives at Jerusalem in the event we call the Triumphal Entry. We'll spend the rest of this Spring, all the way to Easter, looking at the events of that passion week. But in this last text before arriving Jesus reveals that as king he is going to go away to a far country and return. He also teaches us that until he comes, as good stewards, we should wisely invest his resources. The parable begins and ends with thoughts about the work of Jesus as King, and in the middle there's an application section about wisely investing his resources. The opening section is Luke, Chapter 19, verses 11-15:

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. ¹²He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ¹⁴But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' ¹⁵When 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.

“These things” in verse 11 refer primarily to Jesus’s promise in verses 9 and 10 that salvation had come to Zacchaeus the tax collector because Jesus had come to seek and save the lost. Because Jesus was nearing Jerusalem and because he had come to rescue, one of the meanings of the word “save,” the crowd presumed he was going to establish the kingdom of God at once.

In response to this Jesus implies a delay of the kingdom, while telling them what kind of king he would be, and what kind of people they should be. Part of the reason for this parable, and for its placement here, is to teach the disciples that the kingdom is not going to come right away, that something else has to happen first. That something begins with what we’ll look at in the coming weeks, the death of Christ for our sins, and his resurrection promise of eternal life. But the parable focuses on the time after the resurrection, after the ascension but before Jesus returns. Now, in other words.

Jesus says “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.” As a story, as a parable, this makes perfect sense. In our experience, kings don't go to a far country to be appointed king. But in those days, they did. You see, the Romans granted the title of king to certain rulers in their occupied countries. The historian Josephus tells us that Herod the Great in 40 B.C. traveled to Rome, and the Senate under Marc Anthony appointed him to rule as king in Palestine. When Herod died, his son Archelaus traveled to Rome to try to get the title, but the Jews and Samaritans, sent a delegation after him to oppose him. As a result, he didn't get the full kingship. So this kind of story would be very familiar to Jesus' hearers. But the significance of it has to do with Jesus himself. Remember, the parable is told to those who expect the kingdom to come immediately. But now Jesus says the one who is to be the king is going to have to go away to a far country. This means Jesus is going to have to go away before he returns as king and since he says it is to a far country, he implies that he may be gone a long time. We know that to be true. Jesus has died, and risen, and ascended to the Father, and we are still waiting, with hope, for him to return as the appointed King.

Jesus himself said in Matthew 25: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory." Jesus is the king. He already reigns from the right hand of God the Father, and we are already in his kingdom. But he has promised he will return to renew this still very fallen world. We don't know if that's today, tomorrow, or another 100 years, though the current madness makes me think sooner rather than later.

But what we are told is to be ready. Matthew 24:44 "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." What does it mean to be ready? The parable begins to show in verse 13 that while the king is gone we have responsibilities. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, "Engage in business until I come." I believe these servants represent the church, us, now, waiting for his return. We're to put his resources, given by his Holy Spirit to work in this fallen world until he comes.

We'll see much more on that, but verse 14 turns the attention back to this absent king. "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" Remember this was the same thing that happened after Herod, when Archelaus wanted to be king. But Archelaus was a cruel tyrant. Jesus is the most caring of rulers. So these are not wronged citizens seeking justice, but rebellious enemies who deserve judgment, those in every age who oppose Jesus and oppose the good work of his kingdom.

As we study the coming chapters, we'll see the pharisees, priests and leaders of the people working with the Romans to crucify Jesus. But even after resurrection, opposition to Jesus doesn't end. In the early church there was persecution. Later the church was damaged by heresy. With the Renaissance opposition to Jesus came through skepticism and doubt. In the 19th century this spread into the church itself in the form of liberal Christianity. We still see it. Our culture says the church is hateful, unloving and opposed to self-actualization. The response is a supposedly kinder, gentler Christianity called progressive though actually liberal that seeks to smooth over or eliminate every aspect of truth outside cultural norms. Scripture has too many errors and hateful elements, they say. We need to unhitch ourselves from it to reach this culture. In other words we don't want the King God has revealed through Scripture.

Opposition to Jesus has done incalculable damage. This opposition that has made it possible for millions of babies to be murdered since Roe v Wade. This opposition has damaged thousands of victims through porn driven sex trafficking. This opposition is currently turning the feminist movement into a joke as feminists realize that having men declare themselves women undermines the whole principle of equal opportunity.

All this has been done in explicit opposition to God's truth as revealed in Scripture and to Jesus' reign. But this age will not last forever. The king is coming back. Verse 15 says very simply that he returned, having received the kingdom. His return is one of the greatest hopes of every generation of believers. Maybe it will be today, maybe it will be tomorrow, maybe in my lifetime that trumpet will sound, and the Lord will descend, and the whole drama of the last days will unfold. We desperately need that return. This world of sin and shame, hatred and hurt, mourning and death and wrong called right seems to have reached the breaking point, and the older I get the more I long to hear Jesus say "enough."

Because when he comes, we see down in verse 27, he will come as judge. "But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me." That's strong language picturing a severe, sudden judgment of those who have opposed Jesus during this age. All who do not trust in Christ, who do not put their faith in him, will be found guilty based on the reality of their own sin and rebellion and opposition. There will be justice for every wrong done and every hurt inflicted. Those who have shaken their fists in the king's face will find themselves excluded from the king's presence in the misery of their own self loathing and that will be hell.

But the clear distinction between the servants of the king and those who oppose him implies that the servants have great responsibility to support and work for his kingdom. Verses 15-26 *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.'* ²⁰*Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹for 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? ²³Why 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.'*

Verse 13 sets up this whole section: “Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’” The ten minas is not ten minas each, but one each, about a third of a year’s wages. He gives each this large amount of money, and tells them to engage in business, or “put it to work” as the NIV says, or the King James’ poetic “occupy until I come.” This means believers are to invest the resources God has given us. We’ve been given time, money, energy, talent, spiritual gifts, relationships, which we now put these to use for God's glory and God's purposes. As we give of ourselves we are only imitating what Jesus did. He gave completely in offering himself as a sacrifice on the cross, because he loved us and wanted to do the Father’s will, to pay the price for our sins, free us and make us children of His father. Until he returns, he wants us to imitate him by putting his resources to work.

And after his return, beginning in verse 15, the king calls these servants before him, and he is going to investigate the quality of their investment. The first servant comes before him, and says your mina has earned ten more. Ten more, that's not bad. 1000 percent increase. Those mutual funds I talked about are lucky to get 100 percent increase in ten years. You know this servant must have taken a significant amount of risk. As disciples, as followers of Christ, we not only have his resources to invest, but he expects us to invest them actively, to take risk, to go for the God-honoring activities, behaviors and relationships. One thing we’ve learned in the first 19 chapters of Luke is the demand of discipleship. Jesus did not intend people to be unchanged, but to become radically committed Christians. Luke 9:23 is key. “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” As Jesus reaches and enters Jerusalem, the full meaning will be played out before his shocked followers. When Jesus said “take up your cross” he meant “follow me to death.” It’s radical loyalty, a bolder investment than what he asked the rich young ruler. In this interim before his return you and I can look at our Christian lives, remember what he has done, and decide if we are ready to take risk, to joyfully abandon ourselves to ministry, to kingdom work.

Because radical commitment, bold investment, is a source of great joy to a believer. Verse 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.’” Bold investment is a joy because we receive the master's commendation. In a similar parable in Matthew Jesus said “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.” What greater reward could there be? And there is also joy because we receive rewards: ten cities for ten minas. I don't know what that reward will be in the heavenly reality, but I know that it is far out of proportion to what we actually do for him. Even five cities, as given to the second servant is a reward far greater than anything he has deserved.

But then in verses 20 to 26, we see the negative example of a third servant. He is the kind that sits on his resources. “Here is your mina, I have kept it hidden away in a piece of cloth.” Why did he do this? Because, he says: “you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.” He didn't invest the money because he was afraid. I think he was afraid because he had an incomplete perception of his master. He saw only the master's judgment and did not work for joy or for the master's reward. But this is true of so many of us. We live in fear of what might happen: We live in fear of the 'what-ifs', and we are so paralyzed that we never take the bold steps to do what Jesus wants us to do. It starts with a simple fear of the unknown. What if I try this and it doesn't work? What if people don't understand, and they ridicule me? These are legitimate fears. If we're going to be bold, there are these risks. But do you allow these fears to become excuses? The master says “I 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?” But if that was what you really believed “Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?” The master here does not demand the thousand percent, the five hundred percent. What he demands is faithful service, a willingness to use what he has given.

Jesus wants us to know him well enough that we don't let our fears become excuses. We all have fears. Every single one of us is scared of some aspect of life or ministry. I think everyone in this room, myself definitely included, has a fear of sharing our faith. We want to tell other people the Good News of Jesus Christ but we are scared of rejection, of appearing foolish. We're scared of offending someone, or of being impolite. But with the example of Jesus before us, we can allow him to help us overcome fears, to have the boldness to witness, to have the boldness to do other ministries to which he has called us.

If we don't invest, I think Jesus says, we will wither as believers. The master says: “Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the 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.” If Jesus had been constructing a modern ad campaign, he would have simply said: Use it or lose it. Work with the resources I've given you or they will become useless.

Now I've been talking here for several minutes about the resources Christ gives, and I want to just pause and have us think together about what those might be. The obvious ones are time, energy and money, and I encourage you to go back to last summer's series and listen to a few of the messages that helped us see how to use these. Today I want to mention three more provisions God has given that we might not recognize as key resources for ministry.

The first is salvation itself. This is perhaps the principle gift that is witnessed to in Luke. In Luke 1 Zechariah said of John the Baptist “You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.” In this chapter Jesus said to Zacchaeus: “Today salvation has come to this house, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” Salvation is the foundational resource for Christian living. I don’t know if you think about it this way, but it is because we have been saved from sin, not through our own merit but by his grace, that we can risk human resources for the sake of the Kingdom. It is only the person who is securely held in the life raft who can afford to reach down to rescue others. Again, it is only the one who has the assurance of a future inheritance who can afford to give away present resources. We don’t invest our salvation as such, but we can invest everything else because of our salvation.

A second resource is prayer. Luke 11:9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Jesus taught us that we have a loving Father, who hears our prayers. God can and does work supernaturally in the lives of people and in our circumstances when we pray. You rarely hear of someone reaping ten-fold on a monetary investment, but in spiritual things, you frequently hear of some one person touching ten lives, or a hundred lives, or even a thousand lives through prayer. It’s a marvelous way of investing in people’s lives. Just two weeks ago David Jackson’s mom was struggling with heart and breathing issues. A few days later David said “though we had several folks in our family praying for her during the first few days of hospital stay, a dramatic turning point came after we sent the prayer request on the Trinity prayer chain. It is good for everyone to see what a wonderful gift this prayer chain is to our church family and how God uses it. It is a testimony to the power of a praying church family.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is given to us for ministry Luke 11:13 “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” God the Holy Spirit dwells in us. He gives us strength, he gives us spiritual gifts, he gives us fruit, which enables and empowers us to invest ourselves for God. We need every bit of the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control the Holy Spirit gives us if we are to do ministry. We need the words that the Holy Spirit gives as we share Christ in a hostile world. Jesus said: “the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.” And He does. I recently read a book about the persecuted church in WWII Germany, and it was clear that these pastors and lay people were given strength from the Holy Spirit under torture and imprisonment.

So we have salvation to stand on, and we have prayer and the Holy Spirit as resources. Thus we can confidently invest our time, our energy, our money, our talent into specific work on behalf of God's kingdom. This is where it gets intensely practical and personal. Am I so confident of the unseen, of salvation, of the response of God to prayer, and of the comfort, strength, and power of the Holy Spirit, that I am willing to risk the seen, my financial resources, my time and energy, to commit myself to kingdom work and outreach? Am I willing to confront my fears of inadequacy, failure, burn-out, embarrassment, or awkwardness and set them aside, for the sake of obedience to God's calling.

Let me give you just a few of the ways believers have 'engaged in the work' here at Trinity over the decades. Investing in kids is one. There are people like Joanna Rask and Darra Murray who have taught kids in every epoch of Trinity's life. Small groups. Even through the lowest days of the hurricane Todd and Titia continued to invest through their small group, and now there are many groups and Bible studies building into the lives of people here at Trinity. Adoption and foster care. We had a meeting of Knit Together just this week and one of the clear things is that there is risk and fear in caring for kids from these hard places. But there is also great reward. Parenting even of your own biological children turns out to be a ministry with many of the same risks and rewards. Investing in others, whether in their physical needs or their emotional and spiritual lives is a high-risk high-reward behavior. Some of the most positive changes we've seen as a result of the Harvey response have come after months or years of investing in these families and in individuals.

As we close, I want you to back up in your imagination about four weeks, and picture yourself finding under your Christmas tree a lightweight box, about nine inches square and three or four inches high, with your name on it. You open it, and find it is full of money, carefully wrapped bundles totaling \$20,000. Imagine that money sitting there in your hands. What uses for it run through your head? Does something to do with your home pop up, some debt that you owe, something that you really wanted to give for Christmas? Now imagine that after you have removed all the money, you see at the bottom a note. It says "I paid far more than this when I redeemed you. I'd appreciate it if you would invest this until I come." How would the note change your direction? Would you give to the church? Would you give to missionaries? Would you start your own ministry? Now obviously I can't give you \$20,000. Sorry. But you already have time, energy and money. You already have gifts and skills from the Spirit. You already have salvation and immediate access to God through prayer. How will you invest these things? How will you do the work of the kingdom and increase the honor of the king? Wise followers will imitate Jesus by putting the resources he gives to work.