

A Gap in the Curtain

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] John Buchan was one of Scotland's greatest authors. The rest of the book tells the story of how these characters respond to the vision of the future they'd received.

In most cases, it didn't turn out well. What would you do if you could see your future? Well, such a thing is impossible, is it not?

Is there such a thing as a gap in the curtain through which you may see your future? Well, here in these verses, Luke 19 verses 11 through 27, Jesus opens a gap in the curtain.

He shows us our future. And the question for us is this, what will we do with the vision He gives us? This is perhaps the most difficult of Jesus' parables to interpret.

The key to understanding it is in verse 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.

[1 : 37] The people thought that the kingdom of God was an earthly kingdom where Jesus, having reached Jerusalem, would assume the kingship of Israel.

He would raise the flag of rebellion against the Romans and build a new, worldwide, powerful Jewish empire. The people thought that the kingdom of God was an earthly kingdom.

But Jesus never thought that way, nor did He teach that. For Him, the kingdom of God was something very different. It was not an earthly kingdom at all, and it wasn't coming nearly as quickly as the people thought it was.

Other things had to happen before the kingdom of God would come in its finality, in its force, and in its fullness. This parable shows us the future.

It calls us to live in the light of what we know is surely coming. It calls us to reassess what we think about Jesus and to start taking our faith in Him seriously.

[2 : 39] This passage is a gap in the curtain for all of us. Shall we make the most of the opportunity it presents us with, so that on that great and final day when the king returns, it shall go well with us, and we shall hear His words saying, Well done, good and faithful servant.

The parable begins with a nobleman who travels to a far-off country to receive his kingship. Now, this was common practice in the Roman world of Jesus' day.

Before he could be called king, Herod had to travel to Rome to receive the kingship of Judea as a gift from Caesar.

But having received that kingship, it was always Herod's intention to return. But in Herod's absence, this is historical fact, many of his citizens sent a delegation to Rome saying, We do not want this man, Herod, to reign over us.

Well, that's where the analogy between Herod and Jesus ends. Herod was a vicious killer, Jesus a compassionate saviour. But the way in which the kingdom works isn't that different.

[3 : 53] Because Jesus approaching Jerusalem will soon be going away to a far-off country. He will be going to Jerusalem not to institute an earthly kingdom and sit on an earthly throne, but to be tortured as a criminal and be nailed to a cross.

He'll be leaving to go to heaven, where from his Father in heaven, he will receive all authority, power, dominion, and authority, and proclaimed King of the ages.

And yet, having left this earth by the cross, and having gone to heaven, there will be many who in Jesus' absence will say, We do not want this man to reign over us.

In fact, from even before he left this world, the Jewish religious authorities would not bow the knee to Jesus' loving, gracious, and wise reign. They insisted upon achieving earthly objectives, rather than submitting themselves to Jesus as Lord and saviour.

And since then, the peoples of this world have done exactly the same. Our society as a whole, in its thought and action, says we do not want Jesus to reign over us.

[5 : 10] We do not want to be accountable to God for our morals, our governance, or our philosophy. We want to do whatever we want. Whatever makes me happy is my ultimate goal.

For 2,000 years since Jesus has left to go to heaven, people have denied that he is their Lord and King. The history of the world is the history of the rejection of God and its rebellion against him.

We do not want Jesus to reign over us. And we see this every day, don't we? And like the writer of the Psalms, we ask the question, how long, O Lord?

How long will only the fittest survive? How long will the strong oppress the weak? How long will the most violent destroy the gentlest and hate triumph over love?

How long this present darkness? Well, in the meantime, as we read in the story, the king calls 10 of his servants to him and gives them one mina each, the equivalent of four months' wages, perhaps in today's money, 12,000 pounds.

[6 : 23] And he says to them, engage in business until I come. So the king's ambition was for his servants to invest the money he'd given them to make more money for him.

And he entrusts them with this mission. He gives them the resources and he commissions them to use what he's given them to make more. So in the absence of the king, we have two groups.

The first are those who refuse the king's reign. And the second are his servants to whom he has given a commission. And these two groups are really quite different.

The first are the king's enemies who will not have the king to reign over them. And the second are his servants who to one extent or another enjoy the benefits of the king's reign and engage in the commission he has set for them.

If the first of these groups represent those who do not and will not have Jesus as their king, the second of these groups represent those who are followers of Jesus, his disciples through the ages.

[7 : 28] They benefit from his reign and they engage in the commission he has set for them. So what is this commission Jesus as our king gives to us as his disciples?

What is the mina he gives us as Christians? Well, over the last few passages in Luke's gospel, Jesus has revealed to us the heart of the gospel.

God does not favor those who are righteous in their own eyes. Christian salvation is not a function of our reaching up to God by our religious devotion and our moral obedience.

Christian salvation is a function of God reaching down to us through the loving sacrifice of his own son, Jesus Christ on the cross. God favors those who call out to him for mercy, who can offer him nothing except their own sin, who are unworthy in the eyes of the world.

This is the gospel of God, that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, and that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

[8 : 47] The last few passages have shown us that Jesus comes to seek and save the sinful, the undeserving, and the lost. And I want to suggest that it's this gospel that King Jesus entrusts to his followers, the message of this gospel.

He gives us the message of the gospel and then says to us, engage in gospel business until I come. Engage in gospel business until I come.

It's not a monetary commission. It's not a question of political or military power. It is gospel business. It is the message of God justifying the sinner through the sacrifice of Jesus, and that by simple faith in him, a man or woman, whoever they are, is forgiven, and has eternal life.

While Jesus is in heaven, having left his disciples by the cross, resurrection, and ascension, he commissions us as his followers to hold on to the gospel in our lives and to hold out the gospel by our words as the only hope for a sinful and lost humanity.

He commissions us to grow in our faith, to give him back a harvest for the seed of the gospel he has sown with an ass. It's all there in the passages that we've studied for the past few weeks in Luke chapters 18 and 19.

[10 : 15] The message of the gospel is the mina King Jesus gives to his servants. So the question then becomes for each of us, what does he expect us to do with the gospel he has entrusted to us?

What does he expect us to do with the gospel he's entrusted to us? What does it mean to invest in the message of the gospel such that when our king returns, we can offer him an increase in his investment?

Let me suggest the following three aspects of Jesus' commission to us as his followers. First, the commission of Jesus calls us to be faithful to the gospel in our lives.

Faithful to the gospel in our lives. And here's a subject as wide as the Pacific Ocean. What does it mean to be faithful to the gospel in our lives? It means, I believe, to live as far as possible like Jesus.

It means to live as far as possible like Jesus. To love our enemies. To forgive those who have grieved us.

[11 : 32] To depend upon God for strength, for hope, and for guidance. It means to actively subdue our pride and to live in humility considering others better than ourselves.

Some of us have difficult home lives. Others struggle with their work or health. Still others of us struggle with loneliness, with grief, with depression, with anxiety.

So to be faithful to the gospel in my situation might look different to how it looks in your situation. My friend and mentor Colin Mackay who I miss all the time used to be fond of saying to me, you in your small corner and me in mine.

But at its most basic level, to be faithful to the gospel in our lives means to live as far as possible like Jesus.

Secondly, the commission of Jesus calls us to be faithful to the gospel by our service. Faithful to the gospel by our service. As Christians, we are not isolated islands.

[12 : 50] God has designed us to live in community with other Christians in the church. Of course, we know it's not always easy to live with other Christians. We have all got rough edges.

The church is like a grinder smoothing us all out. But as Christians in the church, we are called to serve one another. Jesus said, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

So to be like Jesus is to have the heart of a servant. All of us can serve each other in one way or another. As David Parker keeps reminding me, listening is perhaps the most important part of serving.

Listening to each other, but perhaps also praying for each other. To what extent do we serve each other in prayer? Are there some in this church who are serving too much because there are others who are serving too little?

Are there roles we can take in this church to ease the burden on the few who at present are doing virtually everything? To serve like Christ means to have the heart of a servant. Third, the commission of Jesus calls us to be faithful to the gospel by our evangelism.

[14 : 09] Faithful to the gospel by our evangelism. To evangelize is to talk about Jesus both to Christians and non-Christians.

We used to talk about Jesus. When I was younger, I used to attend the famous Fisherman's Hall in Broda, where we'd sing together redemption hymns.

And one of my favorites was a hymn called, Will there be any stars in my crown? That's how we used to say it. Will there be any stars in my crown? And the hymn was challenging us with this vision of people who will believe in Christ and be in heaven because we shared the gospel with them.

The Glasgow Humane Society is a wonderful society. It exists to save people from drowning in the River Clyde. It's estimated that over its history, the Glasgow Humane Society has saved over a thousand lives.

How many will we save from eternal death? How many will we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with? Oh, not all will believe, perhaps only a few out of the very many, that they'll be stars in our crown, or more properly, stars in the crown of our Saviour and King, Jesus Christ.

[15 : 33] Christ. So here we have then at least three of the aspects of the commission Jesus gives to his followers, live out the gospel, serve in the gospel, and share the gospel.

It's the commission he gives to tax collectors who are changed by his grace, the commission he gives to blind men who are healed by his power, the commission he gives to ordinary Christians like us.

The parable moves on. The king returns, that which his enemies most fear and that which his servants most long for happens.

The king returns from receiving his kingdom. This is the coming of the kingdom of which Jesus refers. It is not what the people of Jesus' day thought it would be.

He did not march into Jerusalem at the head of an army and raised rebellion. Jesus' view was far longer term and far more certain. It isn't something Jesus has spoken of so much so far in the gospel of Luke, but it's certainly something he now announces, having left by his cross and resurrection, the day is coming when he will return.

[16:49] The second coming of Jesus is one of the principal teachings of this passage. Jesus clearly and unmistakably tells us, that though at present he is in heaven, he will one day return.

It's a teaching the Christian church has held dear to its heart from the very beginning. It's expressed, of course, in the Apostles' Creed, that which all Christians everywhere at all times have always believed.

From thence, the right hand of the Father on high, he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. have you reckoned with the promise of Jesus' return?

This is the gap in the curtain with which we began our sermon today. Jesus is showing us the future. He shall return, and he's challenging us to live today in the light of that future.

Just as sure as he came the first time, so he shall come the second time to judge the living and the dead. In our parable, the king returns. Having received the authority of his kingship, he now pronounces judgment.

[18:01] And as we get to the end of Jesus' parable, we see him pronouncing judgment on three groups. In the first instance, he judges those to whom he gave a mina and who made a profit on the investment.

He judges those to whom he gave a mina and who made a profit on the investment. The first comes to him and says, Lord, your mina has made ten minas more. The king responds, well done, good unfaithful servant.

Because you've been faithful in very little, you'll have authority over ten cities. The second comes to him and says, Lord, your mina has made five minas more. And the king replies, and you are to be over five cities.

Now, I want you to notice what these two servants said. Verse 16, Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.

Your mina has made ten minas. They didn't claim any glory for themselves. They did not pat themselves on the back for the good job they had done. Rather, they attributed the profit to the mina the king had first given them.

[19:13] They appreciated the trust their king had placed in them, and they made the most of what he had given them. As far as they were concerned, all they had done was discharge the duty the king had given them to engage in business until I come.

They did not say, look what I've done. There was no sense of self-righteous entitlement as if they deserved the king's favor. Rather, they attributed their success to what the king had given them. And this rhymes true with the whole section of Luke's gospel we've been looking at. Christian salvation is not earned or deserved. It is a function of the grace and mercy of God.

The tax collector in the temple received God's mercy. So did these little children brought to Jesus. So did the blind man whom Jesus healed. So did Zacchaeus, the tax collector.

The greatest reward in their minds was to hear the words of their king saying to them, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

[20:22] In the second instance, he judges the one to whom he had given a mina but had made no more. The one who said to him, well, Lord, here's your mina which I laid in the handkerchief.

For I was afraid of you because you're a severe man. You take what you did not deposit. You reap what you did not sow. Notice this man's attitude to the king. He doesn't view the king as a kind and generous man for giving him 12,000 pounds.

He views him as a hard and severe man. He doesn't love his king. He's not loyal to his king. He's afraid of his king. In the context of Jesus being the king, here's a man who doesn't really know Jesus as he is.

And Jesus the king addresses the fool in his folly. He addresses the fool according to his folly. He says, I'll condemn you with your own words.

You wicked servant. You knew that I was a severe man taking what I did not deposit, reaping what I did not sow. Why didn't you put the money in the bank? And at my coming I might have collected it with interest. Jesus is not a severe king.

[21 : 33] Jesus is a gracious, fair, and just king. He is answering the unjust and unfaithful servant according to his folly. This servant to whom Jesus gave a mina was unfaithful.

By his attitude to Jesus, he shows that he never truly understood and appreciated his king. Bible scholars agree that this describes a man who was associated with Jesus, but not a true follower of Jesus.

Someone like Judas Iscariot. Jesus again is giving us a glimpse of the future. It is not those who are associated with the church who will be rewarded on the day of Jesus' return.

It is only those who know Jesus as their Lord, their Savior, and their King. But then in the third and last instance, Jesus saves the most brutal aspect of this parable.

But as for these enemies of mine, verse 27, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me. All these enemies of Jesus, they may seem to prosper in his absence, but when he comes again, their condemnation will be at hand, and it will be more severe.

[23 : 00] It's a shocking finale to the parable, one with which I think we may all struggle a great deal, because it seems to go against the picture of the Jesus we've seen in the rest of the gospel.

But it's a true picture of the Jesus who, though he remains gracious and loving, is also righteous and just. The Jesus who, upon his return, will reward the righteous, but will condemn his enemies. If the enemies of Jesus in the Israel of his day could have seen their future, would they have arrested and tortured and crucified Jesus?

And if the enemies of Jesus in our day could see their future, this future, in verse 27, would they continue to reject him, to persecute his church?

Or if we as Christ's followers could hear his voice saying to us, well done, good and faithful servant, would it not spur us on to deeper faithfulness to him today?

[24 : 21] The reality is that the king who reigns on high, King Jesus, and is returning in judgment is the Jesus who himself was led like a lamb to the slaughter and gave himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

So that all who have faith in him and cry out for mercy can be forgiven, saved, and have eternal life. The returning king in Luke 19 bears the scars of his suffering even though he is now crowned with glory.

John Buchan's book, *A Gap in the Curtain*, is a work of fiction. But Jesus' gap in the curtain here in Luke 19 is a work of fact.

It will happen. When Jesus returns, he will judge the living and the dead. Jesus graciously gives us a glimpse into the future so that we are ready for that great and fateful day.

What shall be your response today? What shall be your response? If we're not yet Christians, is this not all the motivation we need to believe and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior today?

[25 : 43] And if we are already Christians, what are we doing? With the miner he has given us to invest, what are we doing with the grace of the gospel he has planted within us?

May God bless these words.