

The Return of the King

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[0 : 00] The reading is from Luke chapter 19 on page 1058. As they heard these things, Jesus proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

He said, therefore, a nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minors and said to them, engage in business until I come.

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

The first came before him saying, Lord, your miner has made ten minors more. 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.

And the second came saying, Lord, your miner has made five minors. And he said to him, and you are to be over five cities. Then another came saying, Lord, here is your miner, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief.

[1 : 28] For I was afraid of you because you are a severe man. You take what you do not deposit and reap what you do not sow. 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. Why then did you not put my money in the bank? And at my coming, I might have collected it with interest.

And he said to those who stood by, take the miner from him and give it to the one who has the ten minors. And they said to him, Lord, he has ten minors. 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. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me. Well, good morning. Do keep that passage open. Let's pray again. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have not left us in the dark about your character and who you are and the Lord Jesus.

[2 : 41] Pray now as we come to your word that we would listen and enjoy you speaking to us. Amen. What is the art of a good joke?

Timing. And timing is the issue in these verses from Luke's Gospel. And so the big question this morning is, what are we supposed to do with the delay?

What are we supposed to do with the delay? The delay of Jesus' return is one of the most significant truths about the Christian faith. But it's also one of the most challenging.

Perhaps you're not a Christian here this morning and we're thrilled that you are here. But you might think that, well, if the reign of Jesus is a bit more visible now, if there was a united kingdom of Jesus Christ, if he had his palace and a throne somewhere I can go visit and take pictures of with a flag flying at full mast because he's there, well, I might be interested in living under his rule.

But the delay of Jesus' return looks a lot like non-existence of Jesus' return. And that's reason enough to devote yourself to other things.

[3 : 56] Well, certainly the delay has been enough for many Christians to give up on Jesus. I can think of friends of mine, I'm sure you can too, who are apparently keen Christians. But they're not Christian now.

I don't know exactly what led them to drifting from Jesus, but partly our guess is that they gave up waiting. Waiting for a kingdom they couldn't see. And even if you're a Christian here this morning who has no intention of giving up, well, perhaps the longer we wait, the more we wonder whether we are on a fool's errand.

What are we supposed to do with the delay? Well, we've been working through this section of Luke's gospel that is all about the coming of the kingdom of God. Perhaps you can remember that exam question on the back of the handout, that question set from chapter 1720, has the kingdom of God come?

And over the course of the last few months, we've seen the answer is C, other. Jesus gave a two-stage answer, yes and no. See, on the one hand, Jesus said there's going to be a future coming.

Like lightning that no one will miss, Jesus will return in glory and the kingdom of God will come in its fullness and glory. But on the other hand, the kingdom is already here.

[5 : 18] As tax collectors and sinners and little children and blind men and Zacchaeus in his tree receive salvation from Jesus. And so how we respond to this two-stage kingdom is precisely the issue that Jesus addresses now.

So if you look at verse 11 at the start of this story, 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.

The crowd were suffering from some sort of kingdom mania. Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem and so they thought God's kingdom is going to come. It's going to be two days away. If that, we're going to kick out the Romans, we'll let the good times roll.

And so Jesus knows a delay will introduce a complication they're not ready for. And so Jesus tells this parable to set the clock right and to draw out what disciples are to do in a delay before he returns as king.

So I've got two big points on our handout if you want to look at it. First one is this. The unparalleled opportunity of the delay. The unparalleled opportunity of the delay.

[6 : 37] Let's look at the parable. Verse 12. A nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom, for himself a kingdom, and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minors and said to them, Engage in business until I come.

A miner was worth three months' wages for an agricultural worker, so maybe about six or seven K, a thousand pounds today. And as this nobleman leaves to be enthroned as king, his words to his servants indicate what he expects to be done in the meantime.

Verse 13. Engage in business until I come. Well, the nobleman in the story is Jesus and the servants represent Jesus' disciples. And so what is this kingdom business that Jesus expects his followers to engage in?

In his absence. That's a good thing to get right. Well, this follows on just right after Zacchaeus. So if you look at chapter 19, verse 10, what is Jesus about?

The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. Jesus is about seeking and saving the lost. And we've seen that all over this section, haven't we, in the last few months on Sunday mornings.

[7 : 52] And that is Jesus' kingdom business today. And what a wonderful privilege it is to be involved in that business. I imagine in the parable, whilst this nobleman's away, many people were engaged in work that the coming change in regime is going to completely sweep away.

But not these servants. They're also given a task that will have meaning and value when the king comes back. I wonder if you know where the busiest lifeboat station in the UK is.

London. London. London. Next to Waterloo Bridge. They aim to launch within 90 seconds of emergency call. Last year they reached the milestone of sending out 10,000 lifeboat launches.

All to seek and save the lost. Those in trouble in the water. They have full-time workers. They have volunteers. They have those who donate to this great work.

And they're all involved, one way or another, in this business of saving lives. And they have saved 381 lives in the 21 years since it was set up.

[9 : 09] Well, so too, the disciples of Jesus are to invest in this kingdom business of seeking and saving the lost.

Yes, we're not told how single-minded these servants are. May have only given themselves to this master's business. They may have had other works and responsibilities on the side, which is simply

not told.

It's not part of the story. But the point is, they all engaged. They all gave themselves to the king's business. And so for us, in a busy world with busy lives, it's a real privilege to serve the king in his absence.

Investing in a task that contributes to his future kingdom, even before it's arrived. We're investing in something that will last through this regime change into eternity.

Now, spiritually speaking, we're in a bear market or a bull market. Whichever one is better to invest in, I get confused. But the point is, it's a great time to invest in this kingdom business. It's the unparalleled opportunity of this delay to seek and save the lost.

[10:27] And then there's this prospect of a lavish kingdom reward. Have a look at verse 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.

The first came before him saying, Lord, your miner has made ten miners more. And he said to him, well done, good servant. Because you have been faithful in very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.

And the second came saying, Lord, your miner has made five miners. And he said to him, you are to be over five cities. So the servants, they get busy, they study the markets and get investing.

The king returns and these first two servants give their reports and receive their rewards. Now it's at this point that some may want to draw a difference between these two servants.

The ten miner servant, who's going to be a ten city servant. And the five miner servant becoming a five city servant. But actually, when we think about the whole parable, these two servants belong together.

[11:39] It's the third servant that provides the punchline. These servants belong together. And so the point is not to beat ourselves up saying, am I a ten miner servant or a five miner servant?

The point is, they were faithful. And we are to be faithful like either of them. Just don't be like that other servant of whom we'll come to. And what is clear is that the reward for both is out of all proportion with what they achieved.

Last year, the Guardian newspaper estimated that King Charles' private fortune to be £1.8 billion. So if you're working for the king's portfolio, you might not get too excited by giving £6,000 to invest. And yet the reward is lavish. Just imagine King Charles gives you £6,000. He says, go and do business. He comes back a year later and you're able to give him back £60,000.

That's great. That's certainly better than any ISA I've seen recently. But still next to his £1.8 billion net worth, £60,000 is small change.

[12:51] He finds that down the back of his sofa. But then he looks at your £60,000 and he says, that is absolutely marvellous. Here, why don't you look after Wales for me?

Or Yorkshire or something like that. You see, this blows Tesco Club Card right out of the water, doesn't it? Or any other reward scheme.

It's staggeringly generous. And so the point is that this delay creates an unparalleled opportunity to be about kingdom business, serving the master of the new heavens and the new earth, with the prospect of a reward that is out of all proportion with our efforts.

I'm conscious that we need to hear this. We need to keep hearing this. It's a tired stage of year, isn't it? As you battle through the rain to get here this morning, it's getting lighter, but still dark and cold a lot of the time.

It's also a tired stage of life for lots of us too. There may be the initial enthusiasm about our Christian faith is slowly ebbing away. And we're not even completely sure the kingdom we're waiting for is going to happen.

[14:06] If that's the case, well, then Jesus wants us to be assured that the kingdom will come and the reward for serving him faithfully will be lavish.

And so whatever resources we have at our disposal, our time, our money, our gifts, our expertise, the platforms we've been given, will if we use them to do the king's business of seeking and saving the lost, we won't be disappointed in the end.

Now we can look forward to the day when Jesus will look to his faithful servants in the eye and say, well done, good servant. That's not just the pastors, missionaries, or a select few super radical believers, but to all those engaged in the master's business in whatever setting we're in, with whatever resources we have at our disposal.

What are we to do in this delay before the kingdom comes? Well, first, the delay creates an unparalleled opportunity. But actually, the real target of this parable is not the first two servants. Jesus told this parable, verse 11, for the benefit of those who were under the impression that the kingdom of God was going to come immediately. In other words, he told this parable to those who'd not been listening to him over the last two chapters, and that they weren't ready for this delay.

[15:41] And the punchline of this parable is this other servant. Which is our second point this morning, the unexpected danger of the delay. The unexpected danger of the delay.

You see, the parable now moves from the faithful to the false, to the dedicated servant, to the disobedient servant. Verse 20. Now, I think often this servant is given too much credit, with his actions seem as entirely reasonable.

Perhaps he's risk-averse. He's a safe player. A person who finds kingdom business difficult, seeking and saving the lost, is not really their thing.

Maybe they're a bit shy. And so we could think it's a reasonable move to bury this mine. After all, he didn't lose it. And perhaps we could think the master's being a bit harsh here.

Except, of course, that's nonsense. So let's look closely at the king's response. Verse 22. He said to him, And he said to those who stood by, Take the miner from him, and give it to the one who has ten miners.

[17:25] And they said to him, Lord, he has ten miners. 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.

The king points out that there's absolutely no way the servant acted like he believed what he said. You see, if the master really does reap what he doesn't sow, that is an extra reason to make sure you've got something to show for his investment.

That's something for him to reap, even if it's just the interest. The master is pointing out the servant's failed logic. And of course, he's wrong about the king, isn't he?

Because he's not a severe man at all, as we've seen. Lavishly generous. Giving rewards that are out of all proportion to the servant's efforts. No, we shouldn't give this servant too much credit.

But instead recognize that this is straightforward disobedience. The master said, verse 13, engage in business until I come. And it's not that the servant's investment didn't work out.

[18:34] It's just that he refused. It was normal back then to have a sweat cloth. I guess it is kind of now, if you have a handkerchief, wipe the sweat off so it doesn't get in your eyes when you're working in the fields.

Except this servant's sweat cloth had no sweat on it. Because he didn't do anything. The miner just went inside, and he laid it away.

He could get on with his own business. If he loved the master and knew he was coming back, he would have done the master's business. If he hated his master, but knew he was coming back, he would have engaged in the master's business.

The only reason I can see that he would bury the miner and get on with other things is because you've made that decision that you think he's not coming back at all.

And good riddance to him too. This is disbelieving disobedience. And so the sting in the tail here of this parable is that the same delay that creates this unparalleled opportunity is the same delay that creates this unexpected danger.

[19:41] Just imagine a different parable. The parable of the instant kingdom. Jesus enters Jerusalem. He is crowned, and God's kingdom comes, and all its fall is right then.

Where would this other servant be? One of the servants or one of the enemies? Probably one of his servants, wouldn't he? He'd be entering Jerusalem in this coronation party.

But the master's absence creates a new danger. Not only in a division between servants and enemies, but between servants and servants. As servants who will serve the master in his absence and those who won't.

So Jesus is saying to the crowd, who here is going to be faithful in the delay? For at least some, perhaps the bulk of those listening to Jesus as he spoke this parable, the answer is, well, no.

That's the punchline. Verse 26 again. 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. But as for these enemies of mine, who do not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.

[20:57] The ending for this wicked servant is in one sense ambiguous, but there's little doubt where this servant belongs, given his hostile view of the king and the king's own words calling him

wicked.

And this parable ends on a somber note, doesn't it, with the king dealing with his blatant enemies. His enemies were brought up in verse 14, a reminder for us that disciples engage in the king's business of seeking and saving the lost in the context, in the midst of people who oppose the king's rule.

One commentator said that followers of Jesus operate between the smile of Jesus and the frown of the world. And we have to decide which matters more to us.

But Jesus teaches us in verse 27, what a sobering destiny awaits those who reject his kingship. The delay of the king's return, it creates an unparalleled opportunity, but also an unexpected danger.

And so the question is, what are we going to do with the delay? The answer Jesus gives us through this parable is to serve the coming king in his absence by engaging in kingdom business.

[22 : 18] Yes, this parable is not mainly about how we serve. We get that from the context and doing some digging around. Nor is it about the extent of our efforts. No, this is mostly a parable whether we will serve the king at all in his absence or whether we will take the delay and his absence as a reason to give up on the kingdom altogether.

And so will we keep serving the king in his absence? Again, perhaps you're not a follower of Jesus here this morning and you might like to think that you would serve King Jesus if only it was a bit more obvious.

He seems on paper to be more competent and compassionate than most of what passes for leadership nowadays. So if there was a visible united kingdom of Jesus Christ, perhaps you'd like to think that you'd be a loyal subject.

But as it is in his absence, you see no compelling reason to be a Christian. But Jesus assures us his kingdom will surely come. And in fact, it is here in the midst of us.

But if we want any part of this kingdom at all, then we need to come to him with an open palm in humility, putting our trust in him for our salvation and then serve the king faithfully in his absence as we wait for the kingdom to come in all its glory.

[23 : 46] And perhaps we are Christians here this morning, but we are jaded, tired of waiting. And now we're just tempted to bury our asset in the ground and focus on other pursuits.

Well, we need to understand that the delay is not a reason to lose heart. And because it is an unparalleled opportunity and because it is an unexpected danger and because the Lord Jesus is lavishly generous and because his business is eternally worthwhile, because the lost are there to be saved and because the reward is out of all proportion, then our efforts, we have great encouragement to keep serving the king in his absence.

It's always good to get praise from someone you respect, isn't it? Well, how wonderful it will be to look in the face of Jesus and hear him say, well done, good servant.

At that moment, I imagine we'll be ecstatic with each and every decision that we took to engage in the king's business with every sacrifice made for Jesus shown to be completely and eternally worth it.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus being clear that there is a delay before his return. We pray, Father, we wouldn't use that delay as a time for losing heart or giving up, but that would faithfully keep serving you in your kingdom business of seeking and saving the lost for glory.

[25 : 33] Amen.