

Lessons from Bad Investments

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 3rd of February 2002. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Lessons from Bad Investments and is based on Luke chapter 19 verses 11 to 27.

Well, Rhoda and Amos are not with us today. Jacob's wife and son, we had hoped, would have arrived yesterday.

Jacob is here, our minister from Nigeria last year and this year with us at Holy Trinity. And last Sunday we expected that they would arrive yesterday. The week before we expected that they would arrive the Saturday before, early in January, we thought they might have arrived in the first week of January.

And I remember that in early December Jacob was counting the sleeps to a few days before Christmas when he thought that his wife and son would arrive. As though it was going to happen any day but for whatever reason, whether it's African bureaucracy or Australian bureaucracy, they are yet to arrive.

[1 : 14] And now we hope that they'll be here next Saturday and therefore with us next Sunday. At every point it seems, just when they're about to arrive, there is a delay and we have to wait a bit longer to meet them.

The parable Jesus teaches that we had read for us as our second Bible reading in Luke 19 is to teach the listeners about the delay of the kingdom coming.

You may like to have it open on page 854 in the Bibles in front of you, Luke 19 verse 11 onwards. The followers of Jesus and the people accompanying him to Jerusalem were expectant that the kingdom of God with Jesus the King Messiah was on the verge of arriving.

They thought that glorious kingdom promised in the Old Testament was just about to come. They were probably counting the sleeps till its arrival.

But Jesus taught this parable in order to teach them that there was yet some time before it would arrive. It's nearly Passover time, one of the major Jewish feasts held in March, April, roughly coinciding with our Easter celebrations.

[2 : 36] And for ten chapters in Luke's Gospel, from chapter 9 through to here in chapter 19, Jesus has been on the road to Jerusalem from the north of the country in Galilee, going down the Jordan Valley to Jericho where he is at this point before ascending up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

He's going there because as a faithful Jewish man, he's going with other Jewish men at least, to celebrate the feast as a pilgrimage feast in Jerusalem.

But of course he's also going there to die. And that's very clear along the way, that Jesus is not just going to celebrate the Passover feast, but in fact to die as the real Passover sacrifice himself. to die not for, to celebrate release from slavery years ago in Egypt, but to bring freedom from slavery to sin. En route to Jerusalem, he has been teaching in part about the kingdom of God. For example, early on the travels, he taught the Lord's Prayer to those who were with him, a line of which, as we well know, says, Your kingdom come.

[3 : 52] At Jericho, in effect the last town before coming to Jerusalem, he brought salvation to a repentant tax collector and sinner called Zacchaeus.

And in bringing him salvation, he proclaimed in verse 9 of chapter 19, Today salvation has come to this house. So the expectation of the arrival of the kingdom of God was high.

The followers of Jesus, his disciples and other people on their way to celebrate the feast of Passover, were beginning to think that the kingdom was on the verge of arrival.

And the very next paragraph after today's reading is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where the crowds who were accompanying him put down their palm branches and sang Hosanna to the son of David.

They believed the kingdom was here, with the arrival of Jesus, the King Messiah. And so no doubt there was some almost feverish expectation of this kingdom.

[5 : 03] There was a tradition that the kingdom of God would arrive at a major feast, perhaps at the time of Passover, and so it seemed even more likely that this was the occasion when it would come.

And for some time Jesus has been making this pilgrimage from the north down the Jordan Valley. This is now the final leg. It's like when you watch the marathon at an Olympics.

They run around the town and the city for what seems like an endless age. You're exhausted just watching. And then they arrive into the main arena for that final leg of going around the oval or the track before the finishing line.

Jericho's like that. Now there's a steep climb up from 800 feet below sea level, where Jericho is, to 2,500 feet above sea level, 24 kilometers or so in length.

And Jesus is now on that final leg to Jerusalem. The Messiah King is drawing near. Surely then the kingdom has virtually come. And no doubt with the words to Zacchaeus, today salvation has come to this house still ringing in their ears.

[6 : 13] Jesus teaches this parable. Notice how verse 11 begins. As they were listening to this. That is the word spoken to Zacchaeus that salvation has come. Literally it's got the idea of those words are still echoing in their ears.

Today salvation has come. Is this the day? Has the kingdom of God arrived now even? Before we get to Jerusalem perhaps?

And Jesus then went on to tell a parable. And we're told why he told it. Because he was near Jerusalem. And because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

They thought the culmination of Jesus the Messiah arriving in Jerusalem at its temple would bring in that long-awaited kingdom of God promised throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus then tells this parable to correct their wrong thinking about the immediacy of the kingdom. But also we'll see he teaches the parable in order to show how to wait for the kingdom.

[7 : 22] We well know the Christmas story of how Jesus after being born was taken by his mother Mary and Joseph to Egypt to escape the threat from Herod the Great who killed all the babies under two years old in Bethlehem.

Herod the Great was great but he was also evil. He was the king in name but under Roman rule. He died a couple of years after Jesus' birth.

When he died he had a few sons who'd escaped his own killing of some of his sons. One of them was named Herod Archelaus. He was even worse than his father Herod the Great.

A thoroughly evil man. And when his father died he went to Rome in order to press his claim to the Roman emperor to become the king of Judea and Samaria and the areas that Herod the Great had ruled.

When he went to Rome to claim his kingship Jewish delegation went from Israel, Palestine area to counter that claim to the emperor.

[8 : 39] Herod Archelaus was away for some time. There were at least two court cases that he had to face in order to try and become king like his father had become king.

In the end the emperor said to him that he could rule as an ethnarch over some of the area of Herod the Great. A couple of other brothers or sons of Herod the Great were given other areas.

But he was not king. If he proved himself then he could become king. But not at first. When he returned from Rome not as king but as the ethnarch ruler over Judea and Samaria he slaughtered 3,000 Jews in Jerusalem.

A nice way to celebrate the Passover in 4 BC. Jesus tells this parable probably deliberately to resonate with those events from a generation beforehand.

Jesus says in verse 12 a nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. It's not the sort of thing that you would do these days.

[9 : 55] You don't have to go to a distant country to become a king of your own. But that's the context. That's what Herod Archelaus had done. It's what Herod the Great had done before him. Herod the Great successfully though his son unsuccessfully.

By the time Jesus teaches this parable though Herod Archelaus is long gone. He was deposed by the Romans. He was so bad. And the Romans put their own governor or procurator in the area of Jerusalem Judea and Samaria.

And by the time of these words that procurator's name is Pontius Pilate. Jesus speaks these words also in Jericho the site of Herod Archelaus' grand palace the ruins of which you can still visit today. So he tells of a nobleman who goes away to become a king. He goes to a distant country. That is it's not an immediate arrival of this king and kingdom.

There is a time delay. Or lag before he will return. And in verse 14 he says the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him saying we do not want this man fairly derogatory way of referring to him this man to rule over us.

[11:11] So the sense of the parable is there is a delay before the king will return and claim his kingdom and claim his kingdom back in his own country. Now the point of this story is not to tell about Herod Archelaus who was well known in Jesus' day as a previous ruler of Judea.

Rather it is to make the point that the kingdom will not come immediately. the king in this story or the nobleman in this story has to go away to a distant country to become a king before he will return and claim the kingdom and rule as king.

Now of course in the parable Jesus is speaking therefore about himself. He is the king. That is what the followers around him who are expecting an immediate kingdom believe.

They believe Jesus the king is about to bring the kingdom of God. Jesus is saying yes I am the king. Later on he will say to Pilate my kingdom is not of this world. But he is saying it is not coming right now.

Don't count the sleeps. I have got to go away to a distant country before I return and rule as king. And he is referring of course to the fact that when he goes to Jerusalem he will die but he will rise from the dead and ascend to heaven the distant country from which he will return one day ruling as king.

[12:42] Jesus of course will only be king through his death not because of his miracle works or his goodness or his teaching but it is through dying God will raise him up take him to heaven and crown him as king of all.

From there he will return one day as king. So Jesus then is teaching about himself but saying that though his kingdom is close there are glimpses of it in the miracles and the conversions and in his teaching it will not fully arrive just yet not immediately.

now the rest of the thrust of the parable is to teach us how to wait for this returning king Jesus. What do we do?

And here is where the parable is obviously a made up story not about Herod Archelaus. Jesus said that this man summoned ten of his slaves verse 13 and gave them ten pounds pound each and said to them do business with these until I come back.

Now I'm not quite sure why this parable is called the parable of ten pounds I guess in a few years it will be the parable of the sort of 23.7 euros or something like that. A pound literally here is a minor M-I-N-A which is about a hundred Greek drachma which is about three months labourer's wage.

[14:13] It doesn't really matter what it is it's not a big amount of money. Yes it's three months wages but it's only a labourer's wage it's not that much money. So it's not as though this nobleman is entrusting a fortune to these ten selected servants or slaves but rather he's giving them a small amount indeed later in the parable it's called a small amount as a test while he's away what will they do.

But remember the point is to show that while he's away there is time to do business before his return that is the kingdom is not immediate therefore we are to wait for it not idly but actually productively.

So they are given a pound each ten of them and after a time this man returns in the parable he returns with royal power in verse 15 and he ordered these slaves to whom he'd given the money to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading presumably all ten would front up to him although only three are mentioned in the verses that follow.

The first one in verse 16 comes up to him and he rather modestly declares that the pound that he had has become ten more that is he's now it seems got eleven pounds that is a thousand percent increase on the pound that he got now we might think that's extraordinary it's not all I mean it is extraordinary but it's it's possible certainly in ancient times with huge interest rates even if they were illegal but his modesty is reflected in the way that he speaks of what's happened he says lord or

master your pound has become ten more that is look what I it's not saying look what I've done aren't I great I've made ten more but just your pounds become ten more as though it was a rabbit or a couple of rabbits I suppose and it's become a huge number without me doing anything that's that's his modesty saying your pound has become ten more here and in response he's warmly praised the nobleman says to him well done good slave excellent work in effect is what he's being told because you've been trustworthy in a very small thing that is it's not much money just one pound take charge of ten cities well that's some reward for his wise investments and his business trading while the man was away the second one comes up again modestly he says the pound that you gave me has become five more 500% increase and he's rewarded in turn with five cities we're not told of the other seven only a third one comes up to him and this one has nothing to declare in verse 20 he says to the nobleman or the king master here is your pound I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth

I presume he didn't go and unwrap the piece of cloth when the man came back expecting to find dozens of pounds he expected one that's all he had and that's what he gives back to this master now in his day and age as in ours that's not a very wise thing to do yes he's got one pound Jewish writings of Jesus day said that wrapping coins in a cloth for safety was a stupid thing to do you should at least bury them better still to invest them or put them in the bank or the money lenders table but this man's done none of that he's just wrapped it in a cloth and it stayed there doing nothing while the man was away now the reason why he did that he gives in verse 21 for I was afraid of you because you are a harsh man an exacting strict man you take what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow now he may be saying that this nobleman king does some dodgy dealing but it certainly is saying that he makes money out of other people's work even when he does nothing himself although in this case he's at least provided the original pound now remember that the nobleman's hated he's a harsh man here is a man who perhaps hates him certainly fears him but in response does nothing with his money now maybe he's afraid of making a loss and the consequences that would come to him maybe he's afraid or realizes that if he made a lot of money out of this pound he wouldn't get any of the profit it'd all go back to this rich man he doesn't benefit anything from all his investment work so maybe that's why he did nothing well the rich man who's become the king is unamused by this he says to him I will judge you by your own words that is yes you've said that I'm a harsh man that may be true you say that I take what I don't deposit reap what I do not sow but I've given you the pound is in effect what he's saying and you've done nothing with my money you could have at least put it in the bank he says in verse 23 literally laid it on the money table the money changes table just like our own word for bank comes from bench table same here but he's done nothing and so he says to him at the end of verse 23 then when I returned I could have collected it with interest but there's not even the interest from the bank in this case so what he does is he gets the bystanders who are standing around seeing this altercation to take from the man the one pound from his wrapped up cloth presumably and he says give it to the man who's got ten and the people object it's in brackets in our verse and they said to him Lord he's got ten pounds as though but why give it to him he's already got ten why make him richer now Jesus parables are often full of twists or turns or stings in the tail trouble with this parable is that the next verse looks wrong verse 26 which may be Jesus words rather than the nobleman's words I tell you to all those who have more will be given but from those who have nothing even what they have will be taken away now we read those verse that verse and we think is Jesus saying the rich can get richer and the poor poorer as though the rich can get richer at the expense of the poor we would surely expect Jesus not to say that we expect

[20 : 56] Jesus to say to rich people who've got lots well give some of theirs to the poor and let's be a bit more egalitarian about all this but that misunderstands what this parable is actually saying Jesus is saying that the faithful servants who earn much and use their gifts talents pounds whatever well they'll receive even more but those who don't will forfeit even what they have now of course in this parable Jesus is the returning king but in a parable not every detail is meant to correspond to the reality so we're not meant to say that Jesus is harsh or dishonest or into dodgy dealing but Jesus is talking about himself and his return and what he will find when he returns he's also saying that there is a time before his return to do business with the things that God gives us the challenge then is how do we shape up when he returns now like many of the parables we've seen in recent weeks this at least firstly challenges us about our use of wealth are we putting to good use the wealth that in the end God has given us are we putting it to good use for the sake of the king or are we accumulating our own selfishly our own wealth are we investing in a gospel harvest are we

making eternal friendships as we saw three weeks ago are we giving with compassion and generosity for the poor as we saw two weeks ago are we even being entrepreneurial with our wealth for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of Jesus that is what this parable at least is challenging us to think about how are we using our money our wealth that in the end is from God entrusted to us are we using it to prepare for the day of his return are we using it to accumulate and store up heavenly treasure or just wrapping it in cloth and hoarding it away or keeping it for ourselves but the parable is also challenging us about our use of time Jesus is teaching these listeners that the kingdom is not immediate and therefore we are to use the time before he returns and use that time well that is we're not to wait idly but we're to wait productively I'm a very impatient person I hate going to the doctors and forgetting to take a book because all you find are those glossy out-of-date magazines that are full of drivel they're so far out of date they're telling you what princess Diana is wearing even though she died four or five years ago and so on what a waste of time and I sit there getting frustrated because the doctor's never on time and you wait hours and hours and hours it seems to me so in the end I just don't bother going to the doctor anymore when I'm sick we're not to wait idly for Jesus return twiddling our thumbs and and sort of browsing through the equivalent of stupid magazines we're to use our time productively anticipating his return preparing for it using the wealth the time the gifts that we have for his sake and in anticipation of his return are we winning converts in the meantime are we seeking to build up other Christians are we seeking to encourage people to be

ready for Jesus return the parable we saw last week when Paul preached ask the question will he find faith that is the way that we are to work productively investing what we have for the sake of Jesus return and the kingdom that he will bring that is not of this world but of course Jesus parable is not just limited even to wealth or time because the things that God entrusts to us are not just in money terms but also in terms of gifts abilities strengths and so on are we using them to prepare for his return are we using them productively for the benefit of others in in order to be ready for Jesus return or are the gifts strengths and abilities that God has entrusted to us being wrapped up in cloth so to speak and stored away in a safe part of our home that is if we've got abilities to teach are we teaching others the faith whether in Sunday school or RE classes or in other places if we've been given gifts of hospitality are we using them for Christian service to build up fellowship to invite people into Christian fellowship if we've been given gifts of sharing the gospel are we ever using them or do we just store them away in a filing cabinet this parable is challenging us about the whole way we live our lives anticipating Jesus return as king one day and when he comes we'll be called to give an account for all that we have and all that we've done and can we front up like the first two servants and show the productive way that we've used our lives and lived our lives used our wealth and gifts that God has given us or will we front up with our gifts and wealth wrapped up in a cloth full of unproductivity the parable does suggest that there are rewards for faithful Christians it's true that the only reason why any person will be in heaven is because of God's free grace but the Bible does teach that within those who enter heaven by grace there are heavenly rewards for those who are particularly productive in their Christian lives those who use their wealth and their gifts and their time for the sake of the king the third servant who's mentioned who just wraps his in a cloth we're not told that he's cast into outer darkness or he forfeits his entry to heaven but he certainly forfeits his heavenly reward whatever that is it'll be a great thing to be in heaven it'll be even greater to receive rewards within heaven for our productive lives here on earth there's a third group of people though in this parable there are the faithful servants who use what they're given productively there's the unfaithful or lazy or idle servant who's just wrapped it up but then thirdly there are the enemies of the king and they are mentioned in the final verse as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them bring them here and slaughter them in my presence now they're fairly gruesome words bloodthirsty words almost again we might be a bit horrified to hear Jesus saying words about himself like that have these enemies slaughtered in my presence it's a trendy thing these days to think that everyone will go to heaven the doors will be open wide and whoever you are whatever you've done whatever you've thought whatever you've believed come in it's not the consistent view of scripture at that final time when the king returns there will be a fundamental division of humanity those who are his friends followers servants saved by grace welcomed in but those who are not those who are his enemies those who've rejected him cast out to eternal death it's trendy these days to think that we can choose who we want to have as our king we all like a bit of democracy so let's choose our

spiritual ruler whether it's some guru dressed in orange or Buddha or Muhammad or Jesus or somebody else or yourself choose who you like free choice free society trouble is with that view is that when Jesus returns he is king for all he won't walk around saying if you want me to be your king come and follow me the rest of you wait for your own king he's the king there's no other king he's the king of all and when he returns those who've refused him who've rejected him who are his enemies they will face eternal punishment this parable then encourages us to be faithful and productive as we await Jesus return it warns us not to be lazy idle Christians with the wealth and the gifts and the time that God has given us and it warns those who do not want him as their king about the consequences when he returns let's pray heavenly father father you've given us so much in wealth in gifts and talents and abilities individually and as a church help us not to be fearful or idle or lazy help us not to hoard such wealth and talents for our own benefit but rather to do business with them for the sake of your kingdom and anticipating your return and may we seek to urge your enemies to be like Zacchaeus and repent of their sin and submit to you as king we pray this for Jesus sake Amen Thank you ■ ■ a un ■