

Reaping what we have not sown

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[0 : 00] Bibles to Luke chapter 19. Bibles to Luke chapter 19.

This passage that we're about to read this evening is the passage that has occupied my heart and mind more than any others since that time. It's just one that speaks of the kingdom, but one that needs careful understanding.

So we're going to pick it up in verse 11, Luke 19 verse 11, and we're going to read through to the end of verse 27. Okay, the end of verse 27.

So now hear God's word. Luke 19, beginning at verse 11. As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

He said, He said,

[2 : 56] 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 he said, Well, I pray that God would bless us with the reading and of course the understanding of it.

And we'll come back to that after we have sung this next hymn to God together. Well, this evening we have a parable before us.

And I want to preface it by saying what I said last week about the process of learning. And you especially see this in children. I noticed it a few times when doing Sunday school.

I've noticed it a few times with my own children. And I'm sure any of you who have come into contact with trying to teach a child something, you would have noticed it as well. And that is that learning isn't just about either or.

[4 : 52] It has to be this or that. Sometimes it can be both and more. Children, you know, when hearing something one way and then hearing the same information but something else is said about it, which is equally true, are then led into an area of confusion because they think it's a case of either or.

Well, if it's this, it cannot be this also. Or if it's that, it cannot be this. And that kind of, well, it must be this and not this, causes a lack of understanding or at least a lack of developing understanding because one of the things that happens, especially when reading God's word, is that it can mean several things.

It's not a case of either or. It really is a case of both and. And this is especially true when you're dealing with parables. Parables are not one-dimensional.

They are sort of multifaceted. They require several things to be understood at the same time.

And so notice with me, if you will, just as we get into this parable, that this is told because of a misunderstanding. Okay? This is a parable told to give explanation where there is already misunderstanding.

[6 : 13] And we see that in verse 11. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He's drawing near to Jerusalem. And because the people that he is speaking to, the people of the day, thought, well, this must mean the kingdom is going to be established immediately.

He told them this parable. Because the kingdom was not going to be established immediately. It's not going to happen all at once.

Jesus is going to establish his kingdom, but it's not going to happen the way that they think it's going to happen. Jesus then says this parable in which the people, the servants of God, are to go out and do business for the purpose of profit.

And the profit here, biblical profit, must be understood, of course, in biblical ways. The term money is used. The minor, which is money, can also be sort of, you know, changed in the sense that it could be anything that God has given you.

So not just money. Your life, your time, your efforts, your skills. Everything will be measured by Christ. Everything has a measurement to it.

[7 : 28] So, for instance, if you give two people the same bag of tools with the same amount of timber, and you say, go make something, okay, there's going to be a certain amount of skills that come into that.

There's going to be a certain amount of thinking it through, at the end of which one could have built a boat, the other could have built a bonfire, okay? Okay, well, you begin to realize that, right, looking at a bonfire, it doesn't, well, it actually takes quite a bit of effort to build a good bonfire.

But generally speaking, okay, it doesn't take a great deal of effort to build a bonfire in comparison than it does to build a ship with the same amount of timber and the same amount of tools, okay? It clearly doesn't.

So the idea of effort that goes in is the thing that is being measured, okay? It's not what you have been given, okay, but it's the effort that you use with what you have been given.

Because when this parable is told elsewhere, God, the master, gives different amounts to different people. In other words, their starting point is different. And so you would expect, at least if everything was even, that their ending point was going to be different, okay?

[8 : 43] The issue here in Luke is not so much to do just with what we have been given, but it equally has to do with how we use what God has given us.

So here's the summary of how we take this through. Number one, the parable is told because the people don't understand. They think that Jesus' kingdom is going to be on earth the moment he rides into Jerusalem.

But as we get to the triumphal entry, the thing that surprises everything, everyone, is that he rides in on a donkey, and everybody expects him to turn right into the Roman garrison and overturns them, but he turns left and goes into the temple and overturns his own people.

This throws confusion amongst God's people because they think the world needs sorting out, and Jesus thinks that they need sorting out, okay? Just bear that in mind as a picture, that when Jesus rides into Jerusalem, all of God's people think that his kingdom is going to be established because they think it's not us, it's them, okay?

The world needs addressing. But what Jesus does is he rides into Jerusalem, into the temple, and sorts his people out. In other words, God does things properly, and the world will not be set to order until his own people have been set properly ordered.

[10 : 08] These people then, these servants who have been given minors, are to invest what they have been given as stewards. They've been given it by God, and they are to go out and do business.

And so the issue here is one of stewardship. It's one of being a faithful servant for God.

This then falls back onto the other issue of private property and ownership. Those, especially Christians, who have a particular interest in private property and private ownership, are missing a couple of things.

At least they're reading the Bible, but perhaps not starting at the beginning. It's quite clear that if you read the beginning from page one to the final page, that in the beginning, without any complication at all, that God is the source of all material blessings.

God is the source of all material blessings. Now, if it was a case of ownership, then that would mean that Adam owned the world. Okay? If it was a case of private property, then that would mean that the first man owned everything.

[11 : 21] But is that the way that God actually meant it to be understood? Well, clearly not. Adam was a steward of the blessing that he found himself in. He didn't just have to think about himself, his wife, and his children, but he had to think of every generation that would come following him.

So his stewardship was not just about being responsible with what he had for himself, but he had to be responsible with what he was given stewardship of for every generation that would follow him.

In Proverbs and in the Psalms, it clearly points out that a parent that has something to leave their children is doing exactly the same thing. Okay?

You're doing exactly the same thing. You're looking out for the next generation. And that is good, and that is right. That is biblical. That is, you know, your being like God wants you to be.

In other words, you understand that everything that you have is just rented in many ways. In fact, just to sort of burst your bubble if you've got Kindles, you do realize that Amazon did a real number on anybody who bought a Kindle because you think that when you buy a Kindle book, it's yours.

[12 : 40] Or if you've got any other type of e-reader, it's yours. But what you're buying is you're buying access to that book that's linked to an email address.

Okay? And when you pass away, and that email address is no longer valid, okay, you can't hand that book down to your child. You can't hand it over onto their Kindle.

Okay? Because it's linked into who you are. There's no inheritance to pass on there. And the world's got clever ways of being able to come up with things that pretend that you own it when actually you own nothing.

Well, God has given us the world, and he wants us to steward it wisely. Here in the parable, these people have been given minors to use wisely.

They're to go out and make profit. Two did, and the third did nothing. Two reveals their heart. The third also reveals his heart, especially when he addresses Jesus in the way that he does.

[13 : 45] The first two are rewarded, verses 17 and 19, by being given more responsibility. And the third is called wicked. So here's the principle.

Faithful stewardship, or being a servant of God, means that you use what God has given you for his purposes. That everything that you have is his.

Everything that you have is his. Now, God allows us the freedom to distribute that to the people we want to, to use our skills to help others in the world that we can.

But they were the purposes that God gave it to us in the first place. Okay? When you, as a mother looks after her child, she's doing the very thing that God wants her to do. When a father looks after his, exactly the same.

And throughout the generations. This kind of faithful stewardship, in that I have a limited amount of time, my lifetime at least, to be able to use wisely what God has given me to extend his kingdom.

[14 : 50] To be involved in kingdom work. To bless men and women, boys and girls. In other words, Jesus has gone away.

It is ascension. He is coming again. And this time in between, I am to be engaged faithfully in kingdom work. And kingdom work could mean anything if it advances the kingdom.

If it's investment into the kingdom. In other words, to quote Jesus in his sermon, we are simply seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness. That's what we're doing.

Now, on to the issue then of righteous profit. Jesus clearly approves of profit. He's not a capitalist, but he clearly approves of profit.

But he approves of it in the way that it's understood biblically. And he approves of it in the way that this is given to people who are already taking responsibility.

[15 : 50] So the first two have been given a minor. And they come back having done righteous business and increase what they had been given. And Jesus looks at this as a really good thing. As a really good thing.

That they've made profit. And that profit is something which Jesus, you know, sees as good and then rewards them by giving them even greater responsibility.

Those who have been faithful in a little will always be then rewarded by God to be faithful with more. Now, you know, as a kid growing up, and perhaps you've experienced this as well, that to get that limelight position without putting in the groundwork is something that we've all wanted.

We've all, you know, when we imagine ourselves in a film, we're the main character. Okay? We're not the person that gets killed off two minutes into the movie.

Okay? You don't, you never imagine yourself as that person. Okay? Because it decentralizes you. Okay? And so we've all had this feeling of wanting the crown.

[16 : 55] Okay? Without the cross. Okay? We've all want the crown without the cross. We want the prize of running the race without actually running the race.

Okay? And this is something that we all do. But Jesus here demonstrates that the kind of reward that you get from God is completely parallel to the type of work that you do beforehand.

In other words, the reward matches point for point the work that you have put in beforehand. So those type of people who start something and never finish anything, okay, you've got a problem on your hands.

Those people who are engaged in kingdom work some of the time, part-timers, okay, Jesus understands what's happening here. And all of this relates to the future reward that you will have or not have.

Now, oddly, something else needs to be understood here. And that profit has to be understood biblically. Profit, biblical profit, is not the mere financial gain.

[18 : 04] Financial gain without other things considered would be unrighteous work. So I'll just let out for you. When Jesus said that what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul, he clearly understands without any ambiguity, and he is clearly teaching with real clarity that if a person gains a lot of profit at the expense of their own soul, then nothing's actually gained.

Something has actually been lost. In fact, something really, really valuable has been lost, your soul. So this isn't gain at any cost, gain at any price.

Let's just get profit at whatever the cost is. No. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? Well, it profits him nothing. So there's profit there.

He's gained the whole world. But Jesus is saying, actually, there's no profit there. So profit has to be understood biblically. Profit cannot be at the cost of your own soul.

Okay? It cannot be at the cost. And neither can it be, then, at the cost of anybody else's soul. Okay? We live in a world where people rent out properties to other people at extortionate rates, trapping them.

[19 : 19] You say, well, they got themselves into that position. Well, of course, if you want to think like the world, then, you know, we can all think like that. But biblically speaking, that doesn't parallel or even come close to the way God does things.

Anything that disadvantages another is known as unrighteous profit. Profit, biblically speaking, is the total good done to the total amount of people involved in the transaction.

Okay? In a biblical economy, winners do not win at the expense of the losers. Okay? There's always going to be winners and losers in life.

But that's more to do with faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Okay? If you don't work, you don't eat. You're a loser, but you're a loser through your own laziness. Okay? The winner who is faithful is a winner through his own faithfulness.

But in this world, the system is set up in such a way where winners become winners at the expense of losers. And a classic example, as I said this morning, funnily enough, is a gamble, the lottery.

[20 : 25] But if you think about it, that the winner cannot win any more than the total amount of money put in by all the losers, including him. Okay?

You can't win any more than that. So the pot is only £10,000 if 10,000 people have put a pound in. Okay? But it's probably a negative zero sum in the sense that the Camelot who operates the system have to take their cut.

So the only winners are the people who are putting no money in and getting money out. Okay? That kind of profit where your winning is a direct result of others losing is unrighteous profit.

It is unrighteous gain. And this is why the scriptures don't have to speak about gambling per se, because it speaks about the difference between righteous work and unrighteous work.

There is always going to be winners and losers in this world. There's always going to be winners and losers. But if you want to be a winner, you ought to be a faithful winner. Okay?

[21 : 34] That you are rewarded for your faithfulness. That you are not a winner at the expense of somebody else losing somewhere else down the road. Okay? And there are always going to be losers in this world.

But if you're going to be one of those losers, which we pray that you never are, I pray that you're not a loser at the expense of someone else winning. Okay? But if you have lost, okay, then maybe try harder.

Okay? I know that things are tough, but sometimes it is a case of I just need to dig in just a little bit more here. Okay? Not everything is somebody else's fault.

Okay? Sometimes it could be you're just lazy. Okay? I'm not saying that any of you are, but I'm simply saying that is a real issue. So when Jesus then looks at these two men having made righteous profit, okay, righteous profit meaning human flourishing as well, you'll notice that he gives them responsibility over cities.

One has the responsibility over ten cities. The other has the responsibility over five cities. And cities are where people live. Okay?

[22 : 46] Okay, it always made me funny. You know, I started my business and I was trying to get used to, you know, the paperwork and the details. And, you know, I started under, you know, a conservative government. And then it went to Tony Blair, the first, you know, who lasted three terms, you know, in his business.

And I used to find it funny that, you know, we're not charging you tax. We're charging your business tax. And I was thinking, my business doesn't earn any money.

I, you know, the walls don't pay tax. You know, my disc cutter will not pay the government any tax. So the idea of you framing it in the sense of this is a business tax is just another way of saying we're taxing you and we're not calling it that.

Okay? So the idea here of dealing with people and dealing with profit has to be understood biblically. God's people are given more responsibility because what they keep in mind is people in their profit.

The third man, however, has no profit. Now, on the surface, if you read it incorrectly, you would think, well, at least he hasn't lost anything.

[24 : 04] Right? Now, those who are a bit tentative, those who feel, you know, this is, I'm supposed to do, but what if I lose it all? Well, as I said, there's a way of losing it unrighteously, like gambling.

Or there's a way of losing it righteously, like if your motive to do the right thing was there, but then you got robbed by someone else down the line. But you'll notice that this man here did nothing.

He did nothing. That's the issue. He was given this by God, by the master, to use for God's purposes, and he did nothing. But then he goes even further, verse 21, you'll notice, by calling the master, by calling the Lord, by calling Jesus a hard man.

A hard man. He accuses Jesus, the master, of being a severe man, of being the type of man who doesn't deposit but takes.

That he wants something that he doesn't deposit. He accuses Jesus of reaping where he does not sow. Now, biblically, this isn't true because God created the world and everything in it.

[25 : 13] God has given us the greatest deposit of all. So God clearly cannot be this type of man at all because God has given it all.

And this man is clearly forgetting the fact that he was given a minor by the master. And yet this man is accusing the master of taking what he did not deposit, of reaping where he did not sow.

What Jesus says next is the most important part for understanding this parable. Verse 22. I will condemn you with your own words.

I will condemn you with your own words. Now, what you read next is not Jesus' approval of anything, but he's simply speaking on the man's behalf.

And this is what he says. That if you really believed me to be a hard man, if you really believed me to be a severe man, if you really believed me to be the type of man who wants without depositing, of reaping without sowing, then you should have put my money in the bank at interest, so that on my return I would have got something.

[26 : 25] Because interest is essentially reaping where you have not sown. Okay, it's literally money for nothing. You've done nothing to get it.

Jesus condemns interest on several occasions. This is just one of the clear occasions without any ambiguity where he condemns it. There's only one example in Deuteronomy, but that falls into the lex talion, which we haven't got time to go into.

We could if you wanted. But essentially, Jesus condemns interest. And the reason he does is because he likens it to that of a hard man. In other words, he's saying to the man, the master is saying to the man, if you really believed me to be a hard man, if you really believed me to be a severe man, then why didn't you do something that would please a severe man, a hard man, by putting the money into a bank at interest, so that on my return I would have got something back.

And Jesus is equating here, receiving interest, as reaping where you have not sown. Making money off of money, to use a modern day term.

This is something that Jesus is condemning. So interest on anything, either charging the interest or receiving the interest, is not something approved by God.

[27 : 51] This causes great confusion amongst Christians, but with a few flicks of the pages of the Bible, it's quite easy to demonstrate. The only example where interest is received in the Old Testament is that any reception of interest has to go directly to the poor.

It is not allowed to be kept. So the idea of making money on money through interest could only ever be understood as making money on money for the poor, but which, in the New Testament, Jesus rules out entirely in this parable.

Let me put it a slightly different way in the words of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas understood the issue brilliantly, but instead of using money, he used a loaf of bread.

When you loan out a loaf of bread, what sense does it make to loan it out at a bread roll a day? With a person that you're lending bread to because they have no bread, and we know that Jesus tells parables like this.

A friend goes to a friend at midnight asking for a loaf of bread because he doesn't have any. What kind of society do you think you would live in if the man on the inside said, fine, but it comes at a bread roll a day?

[29 : 05] I'll lend you a loaf of bread at a bread roll a day. Well, not only are you giving, but you're giving on the basis of taking more.

You're giving on the basis of taking more. This man has nothing, and he's coming to you, and the transaction that you're trying to commit is, I'll get more from you in the end.

Well, how is that the type of thing that God is interested in? And Thomas Aquinas understood this brilliantly. To charge interest to anybody on anything is actually somewhere along the line, even if it's taking interest on your bank account.

Somewhere along the line, somebody else who is borrowing money or paying a debt is having to pay more back because it feeds those who are taking more the other end.

I know this is incredibly convicting, and you have to go out of your way, especially with the banking system, to do something about it. But it is something that Jesus would have us do.

[30 : 09] Jesus does not want us to reap where we have not sown, where we have not put work in to get what we receive. That is unrighteous gain.

Because all that it does is it makes people who live in hard times fall on harder times. And when people fall on hard times and they can't pay back what they initially owe, they're unable to pay back the initial plus the interest.

They just can't do it. And so the cycle of debt just increases, increases. And this is why in the Lord's Prayer the word debt is used. It's a financial transaction.

Forgive us our debts. Because debt was a key issue. Not just the debt of sin, but all debts. All debts. Because we're in debt to God, and God forgives.

God forgives. He doesn't say pay it back with interest. Not even close to that. So Jesus condemns these things.

[31 : 12] What God is about to teach us here, or rather is teaching us here, are two things. That in between Jesus' ascension and his coming again, we're to be involved in kingdom work.

But the type of work that God wants us to be involved in is faithful work, not unfaithful work. And this parable is explaining that truth.

This parable is talking about kingdom work done righteously, human flourishing, total profit done to the total amount of people involved in any transaction, rather than reaping where you have not sown.

And that's the issue here. I understand that we live in a world where it's easy to reap where we have not sown, because that's how the world is set up. But that is not how Jesus would have his servants to live.

So here's a few considerations as we wrap it up. God is clearly displeased with the man who did nothing. And that's an understatement, because he calls him wicked.

[32 : 18] He got exactly the same as all the others got. Two were faithful, and he was unfaithful. But notice how he was unfaithful. He was unfaithful by hoarding.

Okay, he was hoarding. What was given to him for the benefit of others in a kingdom advancing, and was looked for upon return by the master, was hoarded and placed in the ground.

And this hoarding, while harmful enough as it looks, actually leads to his judgments. But those who are faithful are faithful with something that they clearly know isn't their own.

It's clearly been given to them. And they understand that the business that they're involved in is not about how am I supposed to use what I have, but how am I supposed to use what God has given me, which is a totally different way of looking at it.

What do I do with what God has given me is a totally different framework and mindset than what do I do with what I have. Because one tends to put it into the bracket of private issue, ownership.

[33 : 29] The other one clearly understands I have it for a period of time. I have it for a period of time. And the idea of Jesus coming, going away and coming again is to drive home to our hearts that this is all to do with a period of time.

So here's the exhortation. When Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, tells us to seek first the kingdom, it is easier said than done. Granted.

Much easier said than done. But he says, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

Okay? Reward follows righteousness, follows seeking the kingdom. Okay? That kind of gracious reward from God follows the faithfulness that is put in beforehand, which means their activity in the world is not just about evangelism.

It is about evangelism, but it's about kingdom attitudes that permeate everything that we do. In our work life, in our home life, in our employment life, in our business life, in our banking life, in everything.

[34 : 39] Jesus' words is to make a difference to all of our life, all of the time. So the issue here is not about what work you do, as much as it is about whether or not you're doing that work kingdom orientated.

This isn't about changing your job, but it could be about changing the way you do your job. Okay? The issue isn't about, it could be about giving it up, if it's completely unrighteous, but it could actually be about how does the kingdom permeate this?

Is there a different way of doing it, according to the lessons that I'm taught by Jesus? Meaning that the advancement of the kingdom on earth is not just a salvific advancement, in the sense that it's not just about men and women, boys and girls being saved.

It's about politics being saved. It's about the banking system being saved. It's about the school system being saved. It's about parenting being saved.

It's about employment being saved. It's about all of these things being redeemed and being made holy and righteous before God. When we talk about seeking first the kingdom, they're the things that we're talking about.

[35 : 57] We're not just talking about the individual salvation of an individual person. So whether or not our work is kingdom work is the question that we need to ask.

To put it in the words of 1 Corinthians, will it make it through the fire? Are the things that we are involved in, will they make it through the fire?

That's the test. So here's the conclusion. Now the conclusion to this message that you're hearing obviously has to be the same conclusion to the parable that you've heard, which is this.

What will you have to show when Christ returns? What will you have to show when Christ returns? After it's made it through the fire.

Okay? You may have a lot to show pre-fire, but that's not the issue. The issue is, what will you have to show Christ when he returns post-fire?

[36 : 58] And that's the sobering conclusion to this parable. Amen.