

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

DOING BUSINESS FOR JESUS

Luke 19:11-27

By

Steven J. Cole

January 23, 2000

© Steven J. Cole, 2000

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation

January 23, 2000
Luke Lesson 88

Doing Business for Jesus Luke 19:11-27

I have a recurring dream which I've read is common among those who have been to college. In this dream it is the end of the semester and I suddenly realize that I have not been attending a class that I'm registered for. The final exam is looming ahead of me and I'm panicked because I haven't done the work for the class. Thankfully, I usually wake up at this point and realize that I'm off the hook. It was only a dream.

But what if it were true? And what if it was not just a college class, but the end of the age and the examiner was the Lord? You realize too late that you must give an account to Him and you have not been doing what you were supposed to have done. That would be an awful nightmare from which you would not wake up!

Jesus tells this parable to warn us about the upcoming exam. He told the parable because the disciples and others who were journeying with Him to Jerusalem had the wrong notion that He would institute the kingdom of God immediately. They didn't realize that He would suffer and die, be raised again, ascend into heaven, and that many years would go by before He returned to establish His kingdom. Jesus wanted to let His hearers know what they were supposed to be doing in His absence. They were not supposed to sit around waiting for Him to return. Rather, they were to be actively doing business for Him with what He entrusted to them. The day will certainly come when He will return. At that time, each servant must give an account for what he has done.

Because we all will give an account, we must faithfully do business with what the Master has given us until He returns.

There was a commonly known historical parallel to this story. Both Herod the Great and his son Archelaus had journeyed to Rome to receive the kingdom of Judea from Caesar. In the case of Archelaus, the people of Judea hated him and sent a delegation after him to Rome to tell Caesar that they did not want this man to rule over them. Augustus compromised by allowing Archelaus to

rule, but only with the title ethnarch, on the premise that he would have to earn the title king, which he never did. Archelaus had built a beautiful palace for himself in Jericho, where Jesus was speaking. Jericho was about a six-hour walk, 18 miles, from Jerusalem.

In the case of Jesus' parable, He is the nobleman who goes to a distant country to receive the kingdom. He is referring to His departure into heaven after His death and resurrection, where He would sit at the Father's right hand until He made His enemies His footstool. During His time away, He entrusts to each servant a mina, which was about four month's wages. Each servant gets the same amount. This parable should not be confused with the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. In that parable, the owner is a businessman who entrusts five, two, and one talent to three different slaves during his absence. A talent was worth about 60 minas, or twenty year's wages, so the amount was considerably more. Here, the owner is a nobleman who gives ten servants one mina each. When he returns, he asks for an accounting, but we are only told of the responses of three of the servants. After he has dealt with them, he proceeds to judge the citizens who did not want him to rule over them. What can we learn from this parable?

1. The kingdom is not here in its full and final form.

Jesus is correcting the false view of the disciples (and others) that the kingdom of God would be instituted in its full form when Jesus got to Jerusalem. He is showing them that there is both a present form of the kingdom, while the king is away, and a future full sense of the kingdom when the king returns. Jesus has already spoken of the present sense of the kingdom, that it is in their midst because He, the King, is in their midst (11:20; 17:21).

But the disciples struggled with the idea that the consummation of the kingdom would be delayed. Even after the resurrection, they asked Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The disciples finally came to clarity on this matter (Acts 3:19-21), but at this point they did not yet understand. They fully expected Jesus to establish His reign over Israel in the immediate future. Jesus wanted them to understand that there would be a delay. In the future, the King will return and will rule in power and glory. In the meanwhile, He is still King, although absent. He wants His followers to know what they should

be doing during that time. Rather than sitting around waiting for the king to return, they should do business for Him, actively working to bring people under His lordship.

2. The Master has entrusted to all of us the same resource to use for Him.

Again, we must distinguish this parable from the parable of the talents, which teaches a different lesson. That parable shows that different servants have been given different abilities, and that the danger is for the person with relatively smaller ability to do nothing. This parable shows that every servant has been given the same gift and that the difference in results is not due to differing gifts, but to differing levels of diligence in using the gift.

The fact that each of *ten* servants received a mina shows that it was not just the twelve apostles who were in view, but rather, God's servants in general. Thus the parable is not directed just to those in leadership, but to all of Christ's subjects. The fact that each was given the same amount shows that it is not referring to differing gifts, but to something that all followers of Christ share in common, namely, the Word of God and in particular, the central message of that Word, the gospel. We all have been given the same gospel and we are told to do business with it for our King during His absence.

If you do not possess the gospel as your own, you are not a Christian, no matter how often you attend church. A Christian has heard the good news that Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners and has personally believed that good news as his own. In other words, a true Christian does not just believe in a general sense that Jesus is the Savior. He believes it in a personal sense, that Jesus is *my* Savior. He died for *my* sins. When I stand before God and He asks, "Why should I let you into heaven?" my only plea will be, "Because I have trusted in Your Son Jesus who shed His blood in my place on the cross." If you have personally believed that message, then the gospel has been entrusted to you. And it has not been entrusted to you just for you to treasure for yourself. Rather,

3. While we wait for the Master's return, we must do business with the gospel in a hostile environment.

The servants are to use the Master's mina in the face of citizens who angrily protest, "We do not want this man to reign over us." In the parable, this is a reference to the Jewish nation, which was rejecting Jesus as her King. They protested to Pilate, "We have no King but Caesar" (John 19:15). But beyond that, it also refers to this evil world that is hostile toward God and does not want to submit to Jesus as Lord and King. It is in just such a hostile world that we are to do business with the gospel, multiplying it by investing it in the lives of people.

Clearly, there is always a risk in doing business in a hostile environment. But the greater risk is not to do business at all, but to carefully wrap up the Master's mina in a handkerchief, not employing it for His purposes. Also, it is implied here what is clearly taught elsewhere, that the power of the gospel is in the message itself, not in the skill of the messenger. The servants do not say, "Master, my great business skill has multiplied your mina." Rather, they say, "Your mina has made ten minas more." "Your mina, master, has made five minas." The power is in the minas, not in the servants. The power of the gospel is not the power of slick salesmanship, but rather God's power working through His Word.

All of this leads me to ask, "Do you see yourself in business for the Master with His gospel?" He has entrusted the gospel message to every believer and said, "Do business with this until I come back." Are you doing business with the gospel for the Master? Are you using the good news of Christ as Savior to bring others into His kingdom, under His lordship? That is the question our Lord would have us consider by this parable.

If you do not see yourself as a "gospel entrepreneur," you will not be thinking about ways to multiply the Master's resources for His purpose. The apostle Paul saw this as his aim. He states the governing purpose of his life: "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (1 Cor. 9:23). But not just Paul and the apostles, but every believer should be living for the same purpose, to do all things for the sake of the gospel. We should see ourselves in the gospel business, using Jesus' capital to make a profit for Him in His absence. If we are not thinking that way, we should change our thinking, because ...

4. When the Master returns, we all will be called to give an account of our business.

The delay in the Master's return does not mean that He will not return. His return is certain, though delayed. The group of disgruntled citizens hoped that he would not return, or at least that he would not return as king. But, clearly, when He returns it will be as King, with full power and authority to reign. He calls His servants to give an account of the business they have conducted in His absence and He orders that His enemies be brought and executed in His presence. Three groups must give an account:

- A. The servants who have done business for Him will be rewarded according to their faithfulness.

Only three of the ten servants are mentioned, and these three fall into two categories: two who have made various amounts with the king's money; and, one who has not done anything with it. Here we are looking at the two who traded and invested the money in such a way that they multiplied it. The first got a ten-fold profit, turning the one mina into ten more. We are not to take this in a literal way, as if he has led ten people to Christ. Rather, the meaning is that he has taken what the master entrusted to him and used it well, multiplying it many times over in the master's business.

The master commends him: "Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities" (19:17). Again, we need not understand this literally, that he will be over ten cities in the millennium, although that is possible. The main idea is that the servant's responsible use of the master's mina will be rewarded with increased responsibility in the future kingdom. The servant has shown himself faithful in a little thing; he will thus be faithful in much, and so much is now given to him.

The master does not directly praise the second slave, but he rewards him proportionately to his success in the enterprise. His mina has earned five more, so he is put in charge of five cities. Some take the lack of commendation to be a silent censure. If the servant had worked more diligently, he could have made ten minas instead of five. But the fact that he receives a proportionate reward seems to indicate that he also had done well. Perhaps the difference in results was due to factors beyond his control.

We can learn several things about the doctrine of rewards from the way the master rewards these two servants. While salvation is by grace alone (the master freely gave the mina to each servant, apart from anything they had done), rewards will be proportionate to our service. Matthew Henry explains, "This intimates that there are *degrees of glory* in heaven; every vessel will be alike *full*, but not alike *large*. And the degrees of glory there will be according to the degrees of usefulness here" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* [Scripture Truth Book Company], 5:787, italics his).

While in one sense, the rewards are proportionate to the service, in another sense the rewards far exceed the service. Earning a mina is "a very little thing" (19:17), but the reward is to be over an entire city, a fairly large responsibility. Spurgeon comments, "The rewards of the millennium will evidently be all of grace, because they are so incomparably beyond anything which the servants' earnings could have deserved. Their Lord was not bound to pay them anything: they were his bond-servants; but what he gave them was of his overflowing grace" (*Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* [Baker], 4:205).

We also learn that the servants' service here was a test and a preparation for their future service in the kingdom (Spurgeon, p. 204). The master tested them to see if they would be faithful in a little thing. Their performance of their duties in this little thing was preparing them to graduate from servants to rulers, yet still under the Master. If the thought of sitting on a cloud in heaven, strumming a harp throughout eternity sounds boring, you need not worry! The Lord has prepared meaningful and satisfying activity for us, both in His millennial kingdom and in the eternal state.

We also learn that the Lord notices all of the service of His servants and that all that we do for Him will be richly rewarded. Sometimes when we serve in the church and no one seems to notice what we've done, we get angry or depressed. Even more galling, sometimes someone else gets the credit for what we have worked so hard to do! Of course, when we feel that way, we have our focus in the wrong place. We shouldn't be serving for the recognition of men. But even so, we should not worry. The Lord duly notes the accomplishments of each of His servants and rewards them accordingly. Our labor in the Lord will not be in vain.

Each of us should be laboring so that one day we will hear the Lord Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful slave." That will be reward enough; everything else is grace upon grace!

B. The servants who have not done business for Him will be stripped of everything they had.

The first two slaves had made a profit with the master's mina, but the third slave had simply wrapped it in a handkerchief and he returns it intact to the master. He offers the excuse that he feared the master, knowing that he was an exacting man who takes up what he did not lay down and reaps where he had not sown. The master chastises the slave for not at least putting the money in the bank, so that it would have earned interest. Then he judges the slave by his own words. He takes the single mina from him and gives it to the man who has earned ten more. When the bystanders express surprise, he explains the principle: "To everyone who has more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away." The one who has proven himself faithful will have more opportunities for faithfulness. The one who has been unfaithful will be stripped of his responsibilities.

The question is, does this unfaithful servant represent a true believer who loses his rewards, who is saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15)? Or, is he a person who professes to know God, but by his deeds he denies him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed (Titus 1:16)?

It seems to me that this third servant does not know the king. He wrongly thinks of him as a harsh man, when in reality he is very generous to the faithful slaves. Darrel Bock explains, "The third servant represents people who are related to the king in that they are associated with the community and have responsibility in it. Nevertheless their attitude shows that they do not see God as gracious and that they have not really trusted him.... Such people are left with nothing at the judgment; they are sent to outer darkness, because they never really trusted or knew God" (*Luke* [Baker], 2:1542). J. C. Ryle observes, "Hard thoughts of God are a common mark of all unconverted people. They first misrepresent Him, and then try to excuse themselves for not loving and serving Him" (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* [Baker], Luke 11-24, p. 305).

This third servant, then, represents those in the church who know the gospel and should believe it. But they are indifferent and unconcerned about the Master's purpose and kingdom. As a result, they are not using the opportunities He has given them to further His kingdom. They are living for themselves and making up excuses as to why they are not serving the King.

C. The rebellious will be punished with eternal separation from the King.

The king says, "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence" (19:27). They hated the king and actively opposed His reign. But their opposition did not thwart His being installed as king. While in the parable the penalty is execution, that is mild compared to the eternal judgment that will come upon those who have actively opposed the lordship of Christ. They will experience eternal torment, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power (Matt. 25:30, 41, 46; 2 Thess. 1:9). They will get what they sought after, eternal separation from the king.

Note also that the issue is Christ's lordship. These rebels did not want Him reigning over them. Those who have truly believed in Christ have subjected themselves to His rightful lordship. Those who reject Christ's lordship will face His fearful and final judgment. There is no category of those who are truly saved, but who opt not to make Jesus their Lord.

Conclusion

There is no neutral position with regard to Christ. Each of us is in one of the three categories. I hope that none here are actively opposing His right to be King. If you are, repent quickly, before He comes and you face His awful wrath. There may be some who profess to know Him, but you're living for yourself. You're not doing business for the King. You need to begin using the gospel in the Master's business. Most of us are faithfully serving Him. If you are, you can expect Him to richly reward you when He returns.

At a pastors' and wives conference, Bill Mills told about a time when he was speaking to a group of Wycliffe missionaries in South America. On the last evening as he ate dinner with the director and his wife, she told him how years before they had been assigned

to translate the Bible into one of the Indian tribal languages. As you probably know, this is a lengthy and tedious process. Before computers, it often took as long as twenty years.

During the process, the translators were teaching the Scriptures and seeing a new church emerging among the tribe. But in this case, as they came toward the end of the translation project, the tribal people were becoming more and more involved in producing drugs and less and less interested in the Scriptures. When they finally finished the translation of the New Testament and scheduled a dedication service, not even one person came!

This missionary was angry and bitter. She had given twenty years of her life so that these people could have the Scriptures, but they didn't even want it! Then she said this with regard to Bill's ministry of the Word that week:

It is as though God has been washing His Word over my soul and healing me, and He has opened my eyes to see this all from His perspective. I am just beginning to realize now that we did it for Him! That is the only thing that makes any sense in all of this. We did it for God! (In his book, *Finishing Well* [Leadership Resources International], p. 190.)

That must be our focus as well. The world may scorn us and reject our message. But we're doing it for Him. You'll never lose if you faithfully do business for Jesus! When He comes, He will reward you for everything that you have done for His kingdom.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some practical implications of "seeing yourself in business for Jesus"? How would we live differently?
2. How does our view of God affect our service for Him? Where is the balance between seeing His grace and His judgment?
3. Obviously, most people have many responsibilities other than Christian service. What does it mean for them to "do business for Jesus"? Is it a mindset or a certain number of hours?
4. Can there be such a thing as a non-serving believer who lives for himself? Consider 1 Cor. 3:10-15 along with our text.

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2000, All Rights Reserved.