

“Use It or Lose It”

Luke 19:11-27

**Baxter T. Exum (#1043)
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Introduction:

If you were here with us last week, then you might remember that in response to a request from one of our senior saints we started a brief series of lessons based on some of the parables of Jesus. We learned that a parable can be just a short statement or it can be a longer story, but it involves a comparison or a word picture with a deeper spiritual meaning. Last week, for example, **»PPT»** we studied a parable from rather early in the ministry of Jesus as He warned us about wolves in sheep's clothing. And of course, the Lord was not really warning us about wolves, but he was painting a word picture—a comparison—as He warned us about false prophets who would rise up within the congregation—they will pretend to be righteous, but underneath they are wolves, and in the end they are not really concerned about the sheep at all.

This morning, I would like for us to fast-forward to a scene from near the end of Jesus' ministry, and the story is told shortly before the Lord enters Jerusalem for the very last time, and it appears that the parable is told either in or near the home of a man by the name of Zaccheus. The account is found in **Luke 19**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found starting on **page 1638**. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and He passes through the city of Jericho. **»PPT»** As a side note, I discovered something new this week, and that is: Jericho (even today) is the lowest inhabited city on the face of the earth. And by that, I mean that Jericho is located roughly 800-1000 feet below sea level! And as Jesus is passing through Jericho, although He is traveling southwest, He is literally heading UP to Jerusalem. You might remember the parable of the Good Samaritan, several chapters earlier in **Luke 10**. Jesus said that, ***“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.”*** Even though he was going northeast, literally, the man was going ***“down”*** the road. It was downhill.

»PPT» Here is another way of looking at it, from Google Maps. With Jericho roughly 1000 feet below sea level (roughly on the same level as the Dead Sea, right next to the plain of the Jordan River), and with Jerusalem being in the hills roughly 2500 feet above sea level, the difference in elevation was roughly 3500 feet. The trip is about 17 miles, and from modern bloggers who have visited the area, it appears to be about a 6-7 hour walk—it is almost straight uphill, but it is possible to do it in a day.

Nevertheless, as Jesus is passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem for the crucifixion, the Bible tells us that a rather short tax collector climbs up in a tree to get

a better view. Jesus sees the man, He comes over to the tree, and instead of preaching a sermon on the evils of tax collectors, the Lord invites Himself over for dinner. We are not told what was said in private, but in response to their conversation, we do know that Zaccheus promises to give half of his possessions to the poor, and promises to repay four times as much to anyone he has defrauded in the past. In **Luke 19:9-10**, Jesus says to Zaccheus and the crowd, ***“Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”***

And with that, we come to **verse 11**, where we find that Jesus is about to tell a parable, ***“...because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.”*** The Lord, then, is getting ready to correct a misunderstanding. Many of the Jews thought that Jesus was getting ready to take His seat on the throne of David, that He was getting ready to set up an earthly kingdom, that He was getting ready to kick out the Roman Empire. Roughly a week away, the Passover would celebrate God’s deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. Many people, therefore, were starting to think that this was it!

And so with that tension in the air, the Lord tells a story—the Parable of the Ten Minas—not ten people who work in a mine, but a story about ten ***“minas.”*** A ***“mina”*** was a coin that was worth 100 days’ wages. **▶PPT▶** If you will, please look with me at **Luke 19:11-27**...

¹¹ While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. ¹² So He said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. ¹³ “And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘Do business with this until I come back.’ ¹⁴ “But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ ¹⁵ “When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. ¹⁶ “The first appeared, saying, ‘Master, your mina has made ten minas more.’ ¹⁷ “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’ ¹⁸ “The second came, saying, ‘Your mina, master, has made five minas.’ ¹⁹ “And he said to him also, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ ²⁰ “Another came, saying, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; ²¹ for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.’ ²² “He said to him, ‘By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ ‘Then why did you not put my money in the

*bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' ²⁴
 "Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' ²⁵ "And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.' ²⁶ "I tell you that 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. ²⁷
 "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."*

As we keep our Bibles open to **Luke 19**, I would like for us to apply this parable to our situation here in Madison by considering three basic responses to the rule of the king.

I. As we sort through the physical story and try to sift out the spiritual meaning, we see a first basic category in verse 14 as we find a group of what I would refer to as **REBELLIOUS WHINERS. »PPT»**

The parable is about a nobleman who goes to a distant country to receive a kingdom, and then he is to return. This might seem a little strange to us in our day of 24-hour news and instant communication. And yet from what I have read, this is something that the citizens of Jericho would have been very familiar with. Israel, at this time, was part of the Roman Empire, and about 30 years before this, after Herod the Great died in 4 BC, there was confusion over Herod's will. Well, Herod's son, Archelaus, had to travel to Rome and meet with Caesar in order to officially receive the rule over this particular area. The journey would have taken several months. We know from secular history, however, that a large number of Jews were upset with the potential of Archelaus being their king—he was just as brutal as his father, Herod the Great—and so they actually sent a delegation of 50 leading citizens to Rome to officially oppose the choice of Archelaus as king. History tells us that they were met in Rome by 8,000 other Jews who were all protesting together. Their argument was that instead of having a king, they wanted Israel to be converted into a Roman province, and they wanted a ruler instead of a king. Well, as a result of the protest, Archelaus was not made king, but the area was split up, with Archelaus ruling over Judea, his brother Antipas ruling over Galilee, and the other brother, Phillip, ruling over the area east of the Jordan. This explains why, at the crucifixion, Pilate the governor at that time, asked the Jewish leadership, *"Shall I crucify your king?"*, and the chief priests answered, *"We have no king but Caesar"* (**John 19:15**).

Well, Archelaus was so mad when he got back, he had thousands of Jews who opposed him put to death. By the way, Archelaus was mentioned only once in the Bible. You might remember that in **Matthew 2:22**, when Joseph and Mary got back from Egypt, they found out that Herod the Great had died and that his son Archelaus was ruling Judea in his place, they bypassed Judea and went to Galilee instead. That is why Jesus grew up in Nazareth, and not in Bethlehem—this was in response to the brutal rule of Archelaus. By the way, there was a huge palace that had been built by Archelaus right there in Jericho. This parable, therefore, is based in part on a very true story. This is something that the people of Jericho would have been very familiar with.

But of course, the story is not really about Archelaus, is it? This is a parable. The spiritual message is that Jesus will not be taking over as a physical king of an earthly kingdom, but He is about to leave to officially start reigning, and in His absence, many people will hate Him and will say, ***“We do not want this man to reign over us.”*** And through the ages, there have been millions who have had this attitude. Many have the attitude, ***“We don’t want this Man telling us how to live! Who does He think He is! We want God to leave us alone! We don’t need any spiritual advice!”*** Here in the United States, some people have a hard time with the fact that the rule of Christ as King is not a spiritual democracy. Here in this nation, if we don’t like something, we can protest. We can throw a tea party. We can rebel. We can vote. We can change things. But in spiritual matters, Christ has never been elected. He has been appointed! He has been coronated! In fact, he is ruling over us whether we like it or not. We have no right to take a vote and kick Him out of office!

Well, what happens with those who protest, to those who reject the rule of Christ? In **verse 27**, when the king returned, he said, ***“But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.”*** Of course, in our modern-day pluralistic society, we almost cringe when we hear something like this. I mean, Jesus is supposed to be all loving and everything. And yet these are the words of Christ! Those who reject His rule will be punished right there in His presence! It is not cruelty, it is justice! These people took the risk when they rejected Christ, and now it is time to pay up.

We remember that verse we studied on Wednesday evening a few weeks ago (**John 3:36**), where Jesus said, ***“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”*** We have seen that verse illustrated in this parable. Those who reject the kingship of Jesus will not have life. The rebellious whiners will be destroyed.

Well, for those of us here this morning, we have an application to make here. If you are on the outside looking in, if you have not submitted to Christ, if you have not yet repented of your sins, if you have not yet been immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins; in fact, if any of us are holding back in some area of obedience, let us not think that we are getting away with something. If we persist in our rebellion, there is a day coming when we will deeply regret what we have done. But even for those of us who have already been baptized into Christ, this right here should also mean something to us. How can we remain silent with our knowledge that the world around us is living in open rebellion to the king? Our role as Christians is to urge people to save themselves from the wrath to come. These are some practical lessons from the rebellious whiners.

II. As we continue looking at the parable, however, we also find some lessons from a second group of characters in this story—a lesson from the FAITHFUL INVESTORS. ▶PPT▶

We find in **verse 13** that the nobleman called ten of his slaves, he gave a mina to each one, and he told them to ***“Do business with this until I come back.”*** The NIV says, ***“Put this money to work until I come back.”*** The Greek word that is used here for ***“doing business”*** is the basis for our English word ***“pragmatic,”*** and so the Lord is saying, ***“Be pragmatic with this money until I come back.”*** Be practical, put it to good use, invest it, do something with it.

And what I find interesting here is that this is different from the parable of the talents that Jesus will tell several days later once He gets to Jerusalem, over in **Matthew 25**. In the parable of the talents, you might remember that each of the three servants was given different amounts according to their ability. However, in this parable, all ten servants are given the same amount. We do a little research, and we discover that a mina is the equivalent of 100 days' wages. And so this is not millions of dollars as with the parable of the talents, but this amount is roughly 1/3 of what a common laborer might earn in a year, or here in Madison, maybe 10-15,000 dollars. And so we have a nobleman who is more generous than perhaps the average slave owner, but he brings his ten slaves together and he gives each of them \$10,000, and he tells them to be pragmatic while He is gone. \$10,000 is certainly not enough to retire on, but it is enough to serve as a test, it is an amount that we can do something with.

Well obviously, this is not really a story about money. But the Lord tells us that we are to be busy with the King's business until He gets back. What is the King's business? Remember, we only need to look back at **verse 10**, the point of His visit to Jericho, ***“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”*** That is the King's mission, and that should also be our mission. Our job is not to speculate as to when the King will return; our job is to be pragmatic—we are to be practical, we are to do something. As I see it, since each one is given the same amount, this is not a reference to natural skills or abilities (as it was in the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25**), but this is a reference to doing something with what all of us as Christians have in common; and that is, all of us equally share in the mission of seeking and saving the lost.

In the parable, the king comes back, and we find the results of the test starting in **verse 16**. The first slave reported that the mina had made ten minas more. Or, in other words, the \$10,000 had made \$100,000. I don't know about you, but if I take \$10,000 to some kind of investment firm and they used it to make \$100,000, I would be pretty happy with that! And the king was happy, ***“Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.”*** An amazing gift! The slave had proven his ability, and so he was given even greater responsibility. Today we know that those who work hard and succeed are often promoted and are given more to work with.

In a similar way, the next slave comes back and reports that his mina had made five minas. And again, most of us would be happy with this, and the king is happy. The king is not upset that the slave did not come back with 10 minas like the other slave, but the king is happy and rewards the slave the responsibility of ruling over five cities. The reward was in proportion to the effort and skill of each particular servant. We think of Joseph who was faithful in the prison and was made to be second in

command in the land of Egypt. We think of Joshua who was faithful as Moses' servant and was made to be the leader of God's people. We think of David who was faithful with his father's sheep and was made to be the king of Israel. God rewards faithful service with greater levels of service.

The first two slaves, then, were spiritual entrepreneurs. They took the ten grand and they got busy on the king's behalf. They put the money to work, the investment was multiplied, and they were rewarded for their faithfulness. In the same way, if we are faithful in taking the good news to those around us, the King will bless us with a reward. As we found in our Scripture reading this morning, from Isaiah 55:11, when the word of God is sent out, it will not return to Him empty! So, what are we doing with what we have? I am reminded of an old story about two young boys who were talking about what good friends they were. One said, **"Hey, if you had a million dollars, would you give me half?"** The friend said, **"You know I would."** **"What about if you had a thousand dollars?"** **"Of course I would."** **"Well, what if you had a thousand marbles?"** **"Yep, I'd give you half my marbles."** **"What about if you had two marbles?"** And the friend replied, **"That's not fair! You know I've only got two marbles!"** You see, God wants our faithfulness in the little things right now, because the little things prove how faithful we will be with the big things. God has entrusted us with the gospel. What are we doing with it?

III. As we look back into the parable, we obviously have a third category here, and the reference starts in verse 20 as we read about THE SLAVE WHO WAS FEARFUL AND DISOBEDIENT. ▶PPT▶

At first we might feel a little bit sorry for him; I mean, he did not embezzle, he was not dishonest, he didn't rob anybody; in fact, he kept the mina all nice and shiny! He wrapped it up in a handkerchief—literally, he wrapped it up in a **"head cloth,"** a cloth that was used for wiping sweat. How ironic! Here was a slave who did nothing. And so he took his handkerchief, which he should have been using to wipe his sweat, and he used this perfectly clean sweat-wiping cloth to protect the nice shiny mina that he should have sweating over!

And so he presents his shiny mina to the king, he comes up with a bogus excuse, and he is punished! I refer to the excuse as being bogus, because in his excuse he says that he was afraid—and yet apparently, not afraid enough to actually do something! If he was really fearful, then he would have been obedient! Earlier this week, I read a story about a woman who was enrolled in a weight-loss program, where every time she had to weigh in, and exercise, and listen to lectures about nutrition. One day, the instructor was speaking on the danger of eating out, and how hard it is to eat right at a restaurant, and how to order the proper food, and sides, and dressings, and drinks, and how to have your meat cooked, and near the end of the lecture, the instructor asked, **"So, what is the greatest fear that you have when dining out?"** This woman raised her hand and said, **"Honestly, the greatest fear I have in eating out is running into you!"** So, here was a woman who was scared, but apparently she was not scared enough to avoid eating out.

Well, back to the parable, we find that in response to this slave having done nothing (supposedly, out of fear), the king responds with severity and refers to the slave as being **“worthless.”** From all outward appearances, this slave might have been a valuable member of society. He might have even passed as a church-going man. But he was **“worthless.”** He was nothing but a pew-warmer. What did he do with his time when the master was away? I don’t know. He might have been busy, but even if he had been busy, he was busy with things that really didn’t matter. And ultimately, he was disobedient. The master said to do something, and this man did nothing.

Can you imagine taking a check for \$10,000 and giving it to some kind of investment company, and we go back in several years to check on our investment, and the banker guy goes over to a file cabinet or a safe deposit box and pulls out our original check, uncashed, **“Oh, I’ve been saving it right here in this folder. I never folded it or anything. And Mr. Exum, notice you can still see your original signature on the check you gave me right here. I am returning it to you in perfect condition.”** We would be so upset! In fact, we would probably be more upset than if he had invested it and had lost a few dollars! As we think about this, we need to back up and ask ourselves again how we are handling the good news that the Lord has commanded us to invest. Are we keeping it all nice and shiny, are we putting it up on a shelf somewhere to keep it safe, or are we working it? The King expects us to take the good news and be practical with it. He wants us to read it and study it. He wants us to do it and share it. How are we doing with that?

In the parable, the king then orders that the one mina be taken away and given to the one with the ten minas. Like the witnesses in **verse 25**, we might also be tempted to think that this is not fair. We think that no one should take from the poor and give to the rich. Usually we see it justified the other way—Robin Hood stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. Or these days, we think of the Federal Government redistributing wealth, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. But try to think about it from the king’s point of view. If I give two people \$10,000 each, and one returns my original check, but the other one gives me an extra \$100,000 as the result of his ingenuity and hard work, I want the rest of my investment money to go to the man who knows what to do with it. And so we come to the theme of this parable: Use it or lose it! The idea is true of athletic ability, or music, or the study of a foreign language—we either put the skill to use, or it has a way of fading over time. And the spiritual meaning is this: Either we obey the gospel and pass it on to others continually, or we will be forced to give it up altogether. When it comes to the gospel, we must either use it or lose it.

Conclusion:

We have now come to the end of this parable, and as we look back over what we’ve learned, I would suggest that all people fall into one of these three categories.

- First of all, many people want nothing whatsoever to do with the Lord. They don’t need a king. They don’t want God telling them how to live. If you want a king, that’s fine, but they don’t want to have anything to do with it. If you are

in that category, we would urge you to reconsider. As I see it, we are living right now between verses 14-15. The King has left, but He has not yet returned, and as long as the King is still away, there is still time to move from one category to another.

- Secondly, there are others who are now working as the faithful investors. There are some who are all in. There are some who have taken the gospel message—they have obeyed it, and they are fervently and pragmatically working with it. Some of you here this morning are actively teaching your friends and neighbors, encouraging them to obey the gospel message. Some of you are preparing your families for the return of the king.
- But then thirdly, there are others who may be Christians but are carefully keeping the good news on a shelf—those who are spending their years hoping that the King will not notice all of the things that we have not done.

All of us here this morning have been exposed to God's word, and so the conclusion is up to us: We can either use it or lose it. When we find a truth in God's word, we can either act on it immediately and move forward, or we can hide it away. And yet if we choose to ignore it, if we fail to act on it, the Bible teaches that we will eventually lose it altogether.

The Bible teaches that we must change our hearts and be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions about God's plan, if you need the prayers of the church, or if you are ready to follow Jesus all the way up that road from Jericho to the cross, if you are ready to give your life to the One who gave His for you, you can let us know about your decision as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org