

A PARABLE FOR THE MEANWHILE (Luke 19.11-27)

Right now, we exist during the great in-between time—a period of human history which, more than any other might justly be called “the interim.” The Bible chronicles a dispensation of about 4,000 years which we could call “the before,” because it was B. C., before Christ came into the world. At some future time absolutely everyone will enter the eternal state, the great “after,” initiated by Christ’s return, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3.13). God has promised us all this and sincere Christians look forward to its full realization with eagerness. After “the before” and before “the after”—that is where we are now, and everything that is actually happening is a prelude to eternity. And everyone who lives is busy doing something.

Where is Christ and what is He doing now? How *should* people live while He is away, and how do we *in fact* conduct ourselves? One thing this parable teaches is that you are living in one of only three possible ways. And what exactly is going to happen to us when Christ returns? Will our actions now affect our experience on Judgment Day? Jesus answered all these questions very simply and memorably in a profound parable about the importance of serving Him faithfully “in the meanwhile,” during this age between His first and second coming. Traditionally this passage is known as “The Parable of the Pounds” [or, Minas, depending on the translation], referring to the money of 19.13, but I think “A Parable for the Meanwhile” is a much more descriptive title (“The Parable of the Talents” [Matt 25.14-30] has similar features but is quite distinct from this one). Its basic message is simple:

Only faithful Christians can expect a reward when Christ returns.

A PARABLE ADDRESSING FALSE EXPECTATIONS (19.11)

After the Solemn Manifestos. Our Lord told this parable just after His interchange with Zacchaeus, “as they heard these things.” The people present just heard that formerly money-grubbing swindler and tax collector promise to yield his ill-gotten gain to the Lordship of Christ (19.8). They also heard Jesus announce that Zacchaeus was now a spiritual son of Abraham, a real man of faith in God and in Christ (19.9). This illustrated His reason for coming into the world (19.10). Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost: to rescue sinners in bondage to covetousness and all sinful lusts and to recapture them for the worship of God alone to His glory.

While Jesus Had the Opportunity. On the heels of this momentous manifesto, Jesus proceeded to tell a parable, and that for two reasons. The first is that “He was near Jerusalem.” Jews in Israel had been traveling to Jerusalem on religious grounds for centuries before this, ever since God revealed to David that this was His chosen city. Every year devout Jews made the pilgrimage for Passover (e.g., Luke 2.41), but Jesus was going there this time deliberately to be

the Passover Lamb and die (Luke 9.31, 51; 13.22, 33; 18.31-33). Now the arrival was probably only days away. Jesus seized a fleeting opportunity to teach.

Before the Full Realization of the Kingdom of God. The second reason Jesus told this parable at this time was because “they thought [i.e., mistakenly] that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” Both this phrase and the parable itself make it plain that He was concerned to disavow them of that notion. Here begin the fireworks in the war of interpretation.

Classic dispensationalism teaches the complete postponement (i.e., it has not even begun) of God’s kingdom until Christ returns; this is one of the fundamental tenets of premillennialism.

Throughout the history of dispensationalism its adherents and critics alike have acknowledged one normative dispensational view of the Davidic kingdom, a view that entails the offer, rejection, postponement, and future fulfillment of the Davidic kingdom as well as a separation of the church in its present form from this kingdom.¹

Clarence Bass, a former dispensationalist, viewed the postponed kingdom as a “definite feature of dispensationalism which distinguishes it from the historic faith.” He offered the following assessment of the view: “The postponed-kingdom idea grows out of the basic concept of what the kingdom was to be, and what it shall yet be. This is held to be a literal restoration of the national kingdom, and since no such covenanted kingdom with the Davidic throne has appeared, it must have been postponed. The kingdom and the church can in no way be paralleled in the plan of God.”

One basic problem of this dispensational premillennialism is that it conceives of the kingdom of God just as the Jews did in Christ’s own day, and even His disciples were not wholly divested of those carnal conceptions. I take liberty to offer an extended quote with great insight from Philip Mauro:

What is central in this novel system of “dispensationalism” is the doctrine, theretofore unheard of, that Christ and His forerunner, when they announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand, were thereby “offering” to the Jews the earthly kingdom of their grossly carnal expectations; that (astonishing to relate) the Jews refused what they most eagerly looked for, when it was thus proffered to them; and that thereupon God

¹ Stephen Nichols, “The Dispensational View of the Davidic Kingdom,” *Master’s Seminary Journal*, VII:2.

withdrew the offer and “postponed” the Kingdom to another “dispensation.” The Scriptures, however, contain not a word about this offer of an earthly, Jewish kingdom, or about the refusal thereof by that generation of Jews, or about its postponement to another dispensation.²

Then as to *what* this modern system of teaching is, it will be a surprise to most of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ to learn that, in respect to the central and vitally important subject of the *Kingdom of God*, twentieth century dispensationalism is practically identical with first century *rabbinism*. For the cardinal doctrine of the Jewish rabbis of Christ’s day was that, according to the predictions of the prophets of Israel, the purpose and result of the Messiah’s mission would be the re-constituting of the Jewish nation; the re-occupation by them of the land of Palestine; the setting up again of the earthly throne of David; and the exaltation of the people of Israel to the place of supremacy in the world. Now, seeing that a doctrine is known by its fruits, let us recall what effect this doctrine concerning the Kingdom of God had upon the *orthodox Jews* who so earnestly believed it in that day. And in view of what it impelled those zealous men to do, let us ask ourselves if there is not grave reason to fear its effect upon the *orthodox Christians* who hold and zealously teach it in our day? The effect then was that, when Christ came to His own people, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand, but making it known that that Kingdom did not correspond at all to their idea of it; when He said, “My Kingdom is *not* of this world,” and taught that, so far from being Jewish, it was of such sort that a man must be *born of the Spirit* in order to enter it, then they rejected Him (“received Him not”) hated Him, betrayed Him and caused Him to be put to death. Now let it be carefully noted in this connection, that the apostle Paul, referring to what had been done to Jesus by them “that dwelt at Jerusalem and their rulers,” said that the reason for their murderous act was “because they knew Him not, *nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day*”, and furthermore, that “they have fulfilled them in condemning Him” (Acts 13:27). This plainly declares that it was because the Jewish teachers had *misinterpreted the messages of the prophets*, that they were looking for the restoration of their national greatness, instead of that which the prophets had really foretold, a spiritual Kingdom

ruled by “Jesus Christ of the seed of David *raised from the dead*” (2 Tim. 2:18).³

I challenge you to judge for yourself which view is more consistent with this parable and the rest of Scripture: a Zionistic physical kingdom or a Christian spiritual kingdom, a kingdom not yet even started, or one that has already grown large.

Consider more carefully the phrase, “should [means, ‘to be about to’] immediately [means, ‘forthwith, instantly, suddenly, at once’] appear [means, ‘to come to a point of being visible, with focus upon the process of being seen,—“to come . . . into view”].” By the word “appear” we are not to understand the inauguration of the kingdom like a tiny mustard seed, but the full realization of it like a large tree suitable for birds to lodge (Matt 13.31-32). “Luke means here the appearance of the full kingdom of God in power with the Son of Man as judge.”⁴ There were great messianic expectations of Jesus, and the crowd sensed something momentous was about to happen when He came to Jerusalem this time. Edersheim explains:

We need scarcely remind the reader that at the time of our Lord the expectation of the coming of a great Deliverer was very general, not only amongst the Jews, but also amongst heathen nations. With the exception of splendor and honor to Israelites individually, a universal Jewish empire, and an ample supply of everything needful or agreeable, the fancy of the Rabbins presented to them little to distinguish the happy Messianic from ordinary times. . . . When the Messiah had at last appeared, . . . His coming would be the occasion for a last struggle on the part of the world-power of Rome under the leadership of Annilus—[the name is probably a form of Romulus]. This chief enemy of Israel the Messiah Himself would slay, and the last of the four great world-empires would be destroyed. Then would the deliverance of Israel be accomplished. Those who were dispersed in all parts of the earth were to be miraculously gathered together and restored to the Holy Land.⁵

This kind of earthly, political, and Jewish millennium is just what they were hoping for from Jesus, but God’s kingdom would not appear immediately or in this form. Remember how He corrected the Pharisees: the kingdom of God does not come with observation, and the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17.20-21). In fact, the kingdom had already begun to arrive in some sense (Luke 11.20). It was a spiritual kingdom and it would arrive gradually, almost imperceptibly. The OT promises in physical and Jewish terms

² *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, chapter 5, “The Kingdom of God: Has It Been Postponed?”

³ *Ibid.*, chapter 1, “Twentieth Century Dispensationalism: What and Whence?”

⁴ *NET Bible Notes*.

⁵ *History of the Jewish Nation*, XI.3.

should not be interpreted in a crassly literal way, but are prophecies about gospel success among the nations through the centuries after Jesus came, and until He returned.

So Jesus told this parable to correct these false Jewish expectations about the nature and timing of the kingdom.

CHRIST'S DEPARTURE (19.12-13)

The Literal Story. "He said therefore." Think about the big picture of the parable and its literal sense first, before we interpret its spiritual meaning. The major characters are a nobleman ("of noble blood and social position, fit for a kingly throne," Wuest), his ten servants (especially three of them), and his citizens. The story begins with the nobleman's ownership of merely an estate, but he is heir to the throne of an entire kingdom, to be given him by another sovereign. He leaves his estate to receive for himself this kingdom, meanwhile leaving his servants to be stewards, managing his goods for him until he returns. His actual departure occurs just after verse 13, and his return is in verse 15, but we know what happened while he was away from verse 14 in the case of the citizens, and from verses 16-21 in the case of three of his servants, when they give an account of their stewardship. The parable ends with the new king repaying all his servants and his citizens fairly and in some cases even generously, but in a way corresponding to their conduct while he was away. We can infer that after this universal judgment, the king and his loyal subjects live together in the kingdom happily ever after. This forms a satisfying conclusion to the whole story.

The Story's Symbols. It is not controversial at all to assert that Jesus is the nobleman, His disciples are the servants, and His open enemies are the citizens. The nobleman's departure is Jesus' departure, about to be accomplished at Jerusalem (His death, resurrection, and ascension). The far country is heaven. The nobleman's return is Jesus' return to earth, not yet realized. The "meanwhile" is the time in which we live, between Jesus' first and second coming. The story's end is Judgment Day, when Jesus either justifies or condemns every person who has ever lived, from the beginning to the end of the world.

The Story's Precedent. Now we are ready to delve into the details of the parable. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return."

The story parallels in part what happened to Archelaus, a son of Herod the Great, who came to power in 4 B.C. The people disliked Archelaus, and they appealed to Augustus Caesar not to give him authority. Jesus is not retelling the story of Archelaus, but the historical events meant that the parable had a well-known plot. A significant detail is that *the kingdom is received during the journey away from the land to be ruled* (emphasis mine). This

corresponds to Jesus' leaving this earth to receive the kingdom following His resurrection.⁶

The unmentioned Sovereign in the parable from whom Jesus receives the kingdom is God the Father. In this case the kingdom reign is not exercised over lands, but people. The verb for receive is active, "to obtain for himself" (Amp.), "to take to himself" (YLT). Afterward, the nobleman would return as king over a kingdom, not to set up a new kingdom from scratch.

The nobleman, lord of an estate with ten servants, summons them and strictly orders them to manage his goods. To each he gives a pound (Roman currency called a "mina," worth 100 drachmas, or several month's wages), about 1/60th of the talent in the other parable (Matt 25.15 ff). In this parable, each servant receives exactly the same amount (contrast Matt 25.15). The nobleman charges his servants to "occupy" ("do business," NKVJ) "till I come." They were to use this money to make money by trading and investing. That much is clear?

The Story's Money and Business. The question is, what does the pound represent, and what, the trading? Usually, we must resist the temptation to interpret parables in too much detail, as if every minutiae has some spiritual significance. Two sensible scholars interpret the pounds here to be, essentially, the gospel message, and the trading, faithfully using it for God's glory:

With that "pound" each of these servants *must do business*. That is the point of the parable. *Those who have heard the gospel must proclaim it!* They must conduct themselves in such a manner that through their word and example sinners are brought to the Lord, believers are strengthened in the faith, they themselves grow in every Christian virtue, and every sphere (social, economic, political, educational, etc.) is brought under the influence of the gospel, all this to the glory of God. That is the one important task for each and every one.⁷

Now, what is the thing in which all Christians are alike? What gift do they all possess equally; rich and poor, largely endowed or slenderly equipped; 'talented'—as we use the word from the parable—or not? The rich man and the poor, the wise man and the foolish, the cultured man and the ignorant, the Fijian and the Englishman, have one thing alike—the message of salvation which we call the Gospel of the blessed Lord. That is the 'pound.' We all stand upon an equal platform there, however differently we are endowed in respect of capacities and other matters. All have it; and all have the same.⁸

⁶ The Nelson Study Bible.

⁷ Hendriksen, NTC.

⁸ Maclaren, *Expositions of the Holy Scripture*.

The gospel belongs, as a trust, to every professing Christian, whether he sincerely believes it or not. The apostles of old (Gal 2.7; 1 Thess 2.4), ministers today (1 Cor 4.1), and even ordinary Christians (1 Pet 4.10) are stewards of the gospel and therefore have a responsibility to use it for the increase of God's glory. Even those who ultimately prove apostates have for a while "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" and "known the way of righteousness" (2 Pet 2.20-21), not to mention other spiritual gifts, without ever being genuinely saved (Heb 6.4-9). All professing Christians, and only they, have a responsibility laid upon them by Christ to serve Him faithfully (1 Cor 4.2) until He comes. Ryle presses us with this truth:

Are we "occupying?" Are we living like men who know to whom they are indebted, and to whom they must one day give account? This is the only life which is worthy of a reasonable being. The best answer we can give to those who invite us to plunge into worldliness and frivolity, is the Master's commandment which is before us. Let us tell them that we cannot consent, because we look for the coming of the Lord. We would fain be found "occupying" when He comes.⁹

CHRIST'S ABSENCE (19.14)

Hateful, Rebellious Citizens. The way Christ tells the parable, he leaves us in suspense about the conduct of the servants while the nobleman is away, and they only report to him after he returns. Not so in the case of the citizens, who "hated him," and sent him that message in its practical implications: "we will not have this man to reign over us." Historically, "when Herod's son Archelaus went to Rome seeking his kingdom, his Jewish subjects sent a delegation to ask that he not be made king over them."¹⁰

Given the whole context and evident interpretation of the parable, it follows that the citizens are "His [Jesus'] proper subjects; meaning the Jews, who expressly repudiating our Lord's claims said, '[Away with him, away with him, crucify him. . . .] We have no king but Caesar' (John 19.15). In Christendom, these correspond to infidel rejecters of Christianity, as distinguished from professed Christians."¹¹ In other words, they are all non-Christians. Jesus is characterizing their attitude and response toward Him. They hate Him, and therefore they refuse to submit to His reign over them.

Christ's Enemies Today. I know it is hard to accept that everyone who is not a loyal follower of Jesus is actually a hateful rebel against Him, but that is how He sees it. He allows no neutrality—you are either for Him (trusting Him, loving Him, and obeying Him), or you are against Him

(disbelieving, despising, and disobeying Him; cf. Luke 11.23). Any apparent neutrality is only a cover for wicked malice toward Christ and His reign. One loose translation of Rom 8.7 puts it this way, "When people's thinking is controlled by the sinful self, they are against God, because they refuse to obey God's law and really are not even able to obey God's law" (NCV). Jesus said that anyone who loves Him will actually be keeping His commandments (John 14.23). The "easy-believism" which teaches one may savingly believe on Christ without submitting to His Lordship is a soul-damning heresy!

Thus we see that there are only three possible identities for all people in the world, and each has to do with one's relationship to Jesus: faithful Christian (obedient professor), unfaithful Christian (disobedient professor), and non-Christian (disobedient non-professor). That's it; you are one of these. Another way to label these three classes is saints, hypocrites, and ordinary sinners. Only saints will be justified and rewarded on Judgment Day.

CHRIST'S RETURN AND JUDGMENT DAY (19.15-27)

Now we come to the parable's extended conclusion. Jesus is teaching "eschatology" (the doctrine of the future) in a very simple way, using a story that even a relatively young child can understand. Before we ponder its deeper implications, consider a few things that lie on the surface.

1) The nobleman's return was not secret but generally known to his subjects. He did not let them carry on as they had in his absence, but interrupted their daily affairs. Even if they would ignore him, they could not. So Jesus' return from heaven will be very public and intrusive for many who were not looking for Him. This is the same reality He spoke of in Luke 17.24, 26-30, and it cannot possibly be forced into a prophecy scheme that conceives a secret rapture.

2) The nobleman's return signals the exact time of accountability, evaluation, reward, and retribution. The nobleman did not return only to postpone or procrastinate in these things, but he immediately set about his lordly task of making judgments and assigning consequences. So does Scripture frequently represent the close connection of Christ's return with immediate, not delayed, judgment. For example, Matt 16.27 stresses the linkage of these two things: "For the Son of man *shall come* in the glory of His Father with His angels, *and then shall he reward* every man according to his works." The Greek word for "then" means "at that time" (BAGD), indicating concurrence (cf. Matt 2.17; Gal 4.8), not just that it was "afterward." Final Judgment will take place in connection with and at the very same time as Christ's second coming. Again, this disproves the prevalent notion that Christians receive their reward between the secret rapture and Christ's glorious return seven years later, and that the wicked dead will not be judged until a thousand years later, after a literal earthly millennium has transpired.

3) The nobleman's return brought judgment for his loyal servants, his disloyal servants, and the citizens who hated

⁹ Expository Thoughts on the Gospels.

¹⁰ Reformation Study Bible.

¹¹ JFB Commentary.

him—that is, for everyone. It was a judgment of universal scope. Obviously this implies a general resurrection and judgment of all mankind, both the righteous and the wicked, when Christ returns. The Bible insists on this also.

- Acts 17:31: “God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness” by Jesus Christ. “There is a day appointed for this general review of all that men have done in time, and a final determination of their state for eternity. The day is fixed in the counsel of God, and cannot be altered; but it is his there, and cannot be known. A day of decision, a day of recompense, a day that will put a final period to all the days of time.”¹²
- John 5:28-29. “The future, final apocalyptic resurrection is in view.”¹³
- Rom 2:16. “There needs be no doubt as to what is in mind in this verse. ‘The day when God shall judge the secrets of men’ is none other than the day defined in verse 5 as ‘the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.’”¹⁴
- Rev 22:12. Jesus connects His coming with His acting as a universal Judge. The word reward is not necessarily positive; it can include retribution for sins. This is not a judgment of believers only as is often alleged (cf. 22:11). “‘My reward is with me’ amounts to saying, ‘I bring it with me to give to every man: either life or death; heaven or hell; the crown or the curse.’ He will be prepared immediately to execute the sentence.”¹⁵
- Matthew 25 is plain enough: Christ returns in His glory (25:31) and gathers all nations before Him, separating them into two groups (25:32) for accountability, evaluation, reward, and retribution (25:33-46). He commends the righteous (25:34) and condemns the wicked (25:41) and declares the end of the matter (25:46). Is this not the universal and final judgment which will occur when Christ returns?
- 2 Thess 1:6-10. “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (1.7) refers to His return. At that very time the persecuted believers will enjoy “rest” (1.7) and He will take “vengeance on them that know not God” (1.8). All this happens “in that day” (1.10). “Both the statement of what is to occur and the definition of the time when it is to occur are to be here observed; and as the one can refer to nothing else than the distribution of rewards and punishments for the deeds done in the body, so the other can have no other reference than to the act of the coming of Christ. . . . And so closely and even carefully is the time defined, that to the exact statement that all this occurs at the revelation

of Christ from heaven, it is added at the end, that this ‘eternal destruction’ takes place whenever the Lord gloriously comes,—‘at that day.’”¹⁶

- Rom 14:10-12. The scope of the acknowledgement of Christ’s Lordship here is the same as the scope of everyone giving account of himself to God; it is universal, including believers and unbelievers alike.
- 2 Cor 5:10-11. “In this verse he expressly comprehends others, and all others. ‘I strive to be acceptable to the Lord for we must all (I as well as all believers, and even all men) must, etc.’”¹⁷

All this disproves the complicated scheme of dispensational premillennialists. How they can evade the force of these texts is beyond me. Now let us carefully work through the rest of the parable.

Christ Will Have Received the Kingdom (v. 15a). The chronological order of relevant events is that the nobleman 1) departs with the purpose of receiving a kingdom for himself, 2) receives the kingdom while he is away, 3) returns, and 4) summons his servants. This sets forth Jesus’ plan to 1) ascend to heaven, 2) acquire His kingdom, 3) return to earth, and 4) sit as Judge. By the time He returns, He will have acquired the kingdom for which He died. All the elect will be saved, having been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). When Christ returns, all His people will be either resurrected or caught up alive (1 Thess 4:16-17), and He will deliver this kingdom He has already acquired to God the Father, because by then Christ will have put down all rebels (vanquishing them by redemption or destruction), for He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Cor 15:22-26).

Christ Will Call All His Servants to Account (vv. 15b-25). Just as the nobleman “commanded” (summoned, ordered) his servants to appear before him, so will God the Son do on that Day (Psa 96:13; John 3:17; 5:22). The point of testing is whether and how much each had gained for his master by trading the pound (i.e., profit). He had entrusted the management of one pound to each servant with implicit responsibility to use it in their master’s best interest.

1) *Testimony and Reward of Good Servants* (vv. 16-19). Although there were ten servants, only three speak in the parable as examples of how the master would respond whatever the case of the others. Each is either good or wicked; there is no in-between.

THEIR TESTIMONY (19:16, 18). “Lord, thy pound hath gained ten (or five) pounds.” They both made a profit for their king, some more than others, but all did well. Consider the spiritual meaning of this.

¹² Matthew Henry.

¹³ D. A. Carson.

¹⁴ John Murray.

¹⁵ Albert Barnes.

¹⁶ B. B. Warfield, *Works*, II:604

¹⁷ Charles Hodge, commentary on 2 Corinthians.

A) Christ's true disciples "trade with the gospel," making use of it in this life to His glory. Christ not only forgives sinners but He also transforms them into true, working saints. Eph 2.8-10 explains those saved by grace alone "are God's own handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works which He has predestined us to practice" (Weymouth NT)—that is, in salvation God remakes us by grace to be good-works-doers.

B) Christ's true disciples have degrees of spiritual "profit." The instances of ten and five pounds are enough to establish this. Real Christians vary in fruitfulness for God. Some, like Paul, work harder and are more spiritually productive, wholly by God's grace (1 Cor 15.10). Remember the "good ground hearers" in the parable of the soils (Mark 4.8, 20).

C) Christ's true disciples render a good return. The least servant here gains five pounds from the one left them—a great increase. Similarly, the soil that yields thirty-fold is wonderfully productive, even if it does not attain the one hundred-fold increase. Likewise, Judgment Day will reveal that Christ will have much glory through even the least of the saints.

THEIR REWARD (19.17, 19). "Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten (five) cities." They both were commended, rewarded proportionately, and rewarded graciously.

A) Christ will commend all His true disciples alike. Even though the explicit commendation is not repeated for the second servant, it is implied. In the verses similar parable of Matt 25.14-30, the commendation is repeated verbatim for the servant who gained less: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (25.21, 23). God will praise every single sincere Christian on Judgment Day. "Then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor 4.5). Hodge points out that the Greek term for praise here means "much praise, applause, a loud and clear acclaim of commendation; Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" (cf. 1 Sam 2.30).

B) Christ will reward all His true disciples in a way commensurate with their service. Ten pounds is rewarded with authority over ten cities, and five pounds over five cities. The proportionate nature of this reward is obvious. Certainly there are degrees of reward for faithful Christians in heaven, as there are degrees of punishment in hell. This springs from the very nature of God Himself (cf. Heb 6.10, where "forget" has the sense of "forget to reward").

God is necessarily *righteous* (Heb. יָדִיק; Gr. δίκαιος) in His judgments, always rewarding all His rational creatures directly proportional to their works, showing partiality to none (Deut. 10:17) but always

acquitting the righteous and always condemning the guilty (Exod. 23:7).¹⁸

C) Christ will reward all His true disciples graciously, far beyond what they deserve. Authority over ten cities for a measly ten pounds is a stupendously generous response—not an indication of the true value of their service, but rather of the nobleman's joyful enthusiasm over their tested loyalty while he was away. This reminds us that not only our salvation, but even our rewards, are purely a matter of God's grace, not our merit. The most loyal and perfect Christian service is not inherently praiseworthy because it is our reasonable obligation (Luke 17.10), nor does God benefit in any way (Job 22.2-3). Even the best Christians serve Christ far beneath what He deserves, falling short of His example and polluting our good works with many sins (Eccl 7.20; Psa 130.3). The reward of eternal life is so infinitely great that it is plainly from God's grace alone, and not in the slightest degree from our merit. Actually, it is the reward of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by grace. God will reward faithful Christians in a manner and degree that will exhibit His super-abounding love, delight in them as His elect from eternity, and His lavish grace, and this will provoke and reinforce our eternal praise of Him. "In the ages to come God will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph 2.7; cf. Jude 24).

Now the text turns very dark, as Christ reveals what will happen to those who are not His faithful servants. Just one *unfaithful* servant appears, but he is as an example for all others. The rest of the parable is terrible, but Jesus judged this to be as necessary for us to hear as the first part. The whole Bible is characterized by announcements of weal and woe, blessing and cursing, heaven and hell. Without the latter, we would not be sufficiently motivated toward the former. God finds us naturally like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or we will not stay near Him (Psa 32.9). Christ is here faithfully preaching both the law with its condemnation and the gospel with its promise of eternal life. This is a pattern we must follow. "Such is the nature of man, that before he can receive a true justifying faith, he must as it were, be broken in pieces by the law" (Yates). "The conscience is not to be healed, if it be not wounded" (Augustine).¹⁹ I feel like the compassionate doctor who says to the patient, "This is going to hurt, but we have to do it for you to get better."

2) *Testimony and Judgment of the Unfaithful Servant* (vv. 20-25). "And another came." He could not evade accountability, evaluation, and sentence, no matter what he expected or feared beforehand. "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish" (Prov 10.28). "The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him (Prov 10.24). Matthew Henry added, "The wicked, it is true,

¹⁸ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 196.

¹⁹ Both quotes from Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, pp. 233-234.

buoy themselves up sometimes in their wickedness with vain hopes which will deceive them, but at other times they cannot but be haunted with just fears, and those fears shall come upon them; the God they provoke will be every whit as terrible as they, when they are under their greatest damps [dejection, depression], apprehend him to be.”

HIS TESTIMONY (19.20-21). It is a bad testimony, not as concise as that of the others, and most disrespectful.

Note, first, *his paltry presentation*. “Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.”

A) The address itself, “Lord,” though accurate, is offensive in this case, because he obviously did not respect his lord as a *lord* (Luke 6.46). The specific charge given was, “Occupy [do business] till I come” (19.13), and this was deliberately, flagrantly violated by omission in the case of this servant. Even so, it is not anywhere near sufficient for our eternal safety to take up a Christian profession and call Jesus “Lord,” if it is not joined with a genuine submission to His Lordship, evidenced by obedience from the heart to His commands. Not *the saying* but *the doing* is what matters most to Christ (Matt 21.28-32; cf. 1 Cor 7.19).

B) The servant also said, “behold, here is thy pound,” but the master was looking for more than the original pound. He had a right to expect some considerable increase by trading. The servant says this insolently, implying, “There! I kept your property intact, and you should be thankful for that!” (Hendriksen). Professing Christians today are far too easily pleased with themselves and imagine that the Lord will be satisfied with their mediocrity on Judgment Day. “I haven’t disgraced my testimony by embracing some heresy or committing some gross and public immorality. That should be enough to get me into heaven.” Ah! But what about your sins of omission? If you remain like the barren fig tree, your Lord will one day come and say, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” (Luke 13.7). The hypocrite’s sins of omission are his barrenness and every bit as damnable as scandalous transgressions (Jas 4.17; Num 32.20-23).

C) He says further, “which I have kept laid up in a napkin,” as if he had done something! The servant might have done this in five minutes after his master left and then given himself to being the lazy bum that he was! The “napkin” was like we call a handkerchief or small towel. This was the storage container used for “safekeeping” (lit. Gk. for “laid up”)! “He even failed to protect the money, as giving it to moneychangers, storing it in a temple treasury, or even keeping it in a strongbox might have done. Wrapping money in a perishable handkerchief was considered one of the most irresponsible ways to take care of money and suggests that the servant was stupid or treasonous or (most likely) both.”²⁰ Oh, the risk professing Christians take with the gospel and the Lord’s name, when they try to coast to heaven without

effort! Many like this have made shipwreck of faith. They often are seduced by false teaching or enticements to great sin and thus give the Lord’s enemies occasion to blaspheme His worthy name. Many nominal Christians eventually fall away to cults like the JW’s and Mormonism, or simply leave the church and go back to a worldly, secular lifestyle.

Note, second, his *execrable (extremely bad) excuse*. “For I feared thee,” etc. These words not only fail to provide any rational justification for his behavior, but also reveal his actual attitude toward the nobleman, and this unjustifiable disrespect and lack of love was the source of the problem.

A) He appeals to his fear. I suppose the connection with his conduct is that he did not want to take the economic risk involved in trading with the master’s pound, but that was not his decision to make. This appeal to his “fear” is meant to portray the servant as an innocent victim of circumstances, excusably incapacitated and an object of sympathy. It fails because the fear was totally groundless. He could have been lying, but maybe he really did feel a paralyzing fear. Even if he did, it was already a fault in him, based on slanderous false beliefs about his master.

Hypocrites fear God in one way, saints in another. The hypocrite’s fear is not good or commendable. It is like the fear of demons (Jas 2.19), or an abused slave who only serves enough to avoid a whipping and not from true respect and love for his master. False Christians only aim to avoid hell, not to please God. Their great goal is to save their own skin, not to have fellowship with Jesus Christ. They would run headlong into the most abominable sins if God gave them license to do so without bad consequences.

True Christians, on the other hand, fear God the way a loyal son respects his father in the context of family acceptance and affection. Theirs is a loving awe based on a true knowledge of God and a desire to know Him more intimately. These two kinds of fear (slavish and reverential) work against each other.

The banishing of a slavish fear, by a holy assurance, is attended with a proportional increase of a reverential fear. The diminishing of the fear of the fruits of God’s displeasure in future punishment, is attended with a proportional increase of fear of his displeasure itself; the diminishing of the fear of hell, with an increase of the fear of sin.²¹

B) He harbored ill thoughts of his lord as “an austere man,” that is, severe, exacting, strict, harsh, even to the point of being unreasonable. The servant characterizes him in proverbial language as “taking up what he did not lay down, and reaping what he did not sow,” almost a thief.

Have you ever had a really bad boss, one that was a slave-driver and impossible to please? No matter how hard

²⁰ IVP Bible Background Commentary.

²¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, III.IX.

you tried, it was always not good enough, if not altogether wrong. You never expected a kind word from him, and if he had complimented you on a job well done, you would have been amazed. The Pharaoh in Moses' days was like that. When this pagan was most filled with Satanic malice against his servants, he did so abuse them, taking away their means of productivity and then beating them when they did not reach their assigned quota. The servant's testimony shows he viewed his lord to be like this. And with that attitude, he succumbed to the temptation of laziness. "Why even try? It's no use. I am going to be in trouble no matter what I do."

My friends, could it be that you have viewed God this way, and that is why you work no harder at serving Him? Jesus is implying by the parable that during the time while He is in heaven receiving His kingdom, some professing Christians will think of Him this way, but this is

a most iniquitous charge, since none so liberal as He, giving gifts, grace and glory, freely; imposing no grievous commands on men; His yoke being easy, and His burden light; never sending a man to a warfare at his own charge; but always giving grace and strength proportional to the service He calls to, and rewarding His servants in a most bountiful manner, infinitely beyond their deserts.²²

The master's vindication is plainly evident from the way he treated the faithful servants, and the emptiness of this servant's excuse is exposed by the other servants' successes. The fault lay wholly with the servant now being examined.

HIS JUDGMENT (19.22-25). The new king determined that enough had been said to render a just verdict on this servant, and so he announces it without any further delay. Note that the lord had taken great personal offense. This was not only a case of administrative failure, but of deep-seated contempt and protracted disloyalty.

A) The servant's judgment was based on his own conduct and testimony. "Out of thy own mouth I will judge thee," and the judgment makes it plain that past performance was also in view. This trial would not be based on hearsay, questionable evidence, or the missteps of a well-intentioned mediator. The servant was allowed to speak for himself, and then he was taken at his word. This highlights the utter justice of the whole proceeding and its outcome, even though the servant was condemned. So it will be with all hypocrites on Judgment Day, not only with words uttered then, but with every idle word they ever spoke (Matt 12.36-37). Right now people have their excuses for not serving Christ with all their hearts. They have sufficiently rationalized their unfaithfulness to gain a conscience mostly at ease, but when each and every non-committed Christian, whether they have been part of a local church or not, stands before Jesus Christ on His throne of glory, then he or she will

give an account in their own words, and all will see they have no excuse. Further, their wretched testimony will anger the judging King right at the moment of their eternal sentencing.

B) It revealed his wickedness. "Thou wicked servant." The Greek word means "wicked, evil, bad, base," "morally corrupt," and "worthless."²³ This particular Greek term is a strong one, used even of Satan (1 John 2.13) and demons (Luke 7.21). The servant may have been surprised to be so characterized, but this was his lord's evaluation. It necessarily follows that the one represented by this worthless servant in the parable is counted wicked by Christ. Only the spiritually and morally naïve think there are no bad people in the world, because Christ says otherwise.

Some err by teaching this represents a true Christian who goes to heaven but without any reward, but the label "wicked" puts the matter beyond doubt. This servant has betrayed his master; he is "a son of Judas," if not equal to him in degree. He was entrusted with his master's goods, and had a name and the position of being his master's servant, and yet he had no sincere interest whatsoever in his master's advantage. The parallel today is certainly found in hypocrites, people who only pretend to be Christians. Truly they are wicked and richly deserve such condemnation.

Of all men in the world hypocrites are deepest under a curse. They are the most cursed who are most wicked; hypocrites are therefore more wicked than others, because they would seem not only somewhat, but much more holy than others. It is bad enough to be bad; but it is worse to appear good when we are bad.²⁴

C) It exposed his excuses. When the nobleman says, "Thou knewest that I was an austere man," and etc., he is not admitting this to be true but granting it for the sake of argument. "Let us suppose that the slanderous things you say about me are true. Even in that case, you might have done much better than you have," and then he explains how that, without any more work on his part than he had already expended (which was next to nothing), and even with less risk (since a bank was more secure than a napkin), he could have made some profit from accruing interest. This servant did not render even a modicum of faithful service to his master; he truly was worthless, unworthy of commendation, reward, and greater responsibilities. Those who aim to use this part of the parable to pass a judgment pro or con on the ethics of charging interest are missing the point.

D) It ended his privileges. Some unnamed and loyal servants of the nobleman are standing by, and to them he issues this command: "Take from him [the wicked servant] the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds." "The point of redistributing the mina is that the most faithful slave gets additional reward and responsibility, while the

²³ BAGD, Luow-Nida, Liddell and Scott lexicons, respectively.

²⁴ Puritan Joseph Caryl on Job 15.34.

²² Gill's commentary.

unfaithful slave gets judgment.”²⁵ Being a steward of the nobleman was a temporary privilege, now taken away because the servant had proved he was not trustworthy (cf. Luke 16.1-2). This is not disciplinary but judicial. It is not meant for his reformation but for the gratification of divine revenge. As this parable conveys what will happen when Christ returns and there is Judgment Day, it foretells the end of mere hypocrites. They will no longer be outwardly identified as Christians, and they will lose any and all responsibilities in the kingdom of God. They will be rejected and discarded on the trash heap of human scum along with the open sinners to suffer shame and punishment forever.

The slothful servant may make excuses, but they will be brushed aside; he himself will be severely condemned; he will be divested of what he has left him; he will be sent into saddest exile (Matt 25.30). It is not the atheist, or the criminal, or the perpetrator of vicious deeds; it is not the outward and flagrant transgressor, who is here condemned and sentenced; it is the man who made nothing of his life; it is the man who had no sense of sacred responsibility; it is he who withheld his powers from the service of God; it is he who is pronounced to be so guilty. To let our lives go by without making them a service and a blessing, to let our powers and our opportunities rust in mere disuse, is to be accumulating a debt which we shall not be able to discharge, and which will make us to appear bankrupt at the great account.²⁶

Right at this point some there respectfully raised an objection. “Lord, he hath ten pounds.” It does not seem fair to them to take away this servant’s one and only pound and give it to the one with the most, but it is fair, because the nobleman is the one who owns it all and makes the rules. There is nothing inherently unjust about taking away the stewardship from an unfaithful servant, nor in being so generous with the servants that most pleased the master.

Christ Will Give More to Some, Take Away from Others (v. 26). Jesus inserts His own proverb into the parable to defend the nobleman’s act and to explain an eternal principle of God’s kingdom. “For I say unto you” is an appeal to His authority and veracity.

*To everyone who has, more will be given,
but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*

The meaning of this is illustrated in the parable itself. The faithful servants who could come back and report an increase to their master received a great reward. The servant who made nothing with his pound had even that taken away. True believers will, by God’s grace, be able to testify of some good works as the fruit of true faith, and they will have more

spiritual responsibility given them, but hypocrites will lose absolutely everything of value on Judgment Day.

Christ Will Severely Punish Open Rebels (v. 27). The parable ends abruptly with an announcement of the death penalty for the hostile, rebellious citizens (cf. 19.14). The strong implication is that the new king had authority and power to carry out his decree, and these were slain at his command. The Greek verb for “slay” is a graphic and brutal verb meaning “slaughter” (to kill people in a cruel or violent way, typically in large numbers, NOAD). “Before me” suggests that the king would see for himself that this was carried out according to his just wishes; he would supervise the mass executions until they were finished.

Again, all this was an illustration of future reality—one historical, and the other yet future. Those Jews living at the time who refused to be considered disciples of Christ, but rather hated and opposed Him, even crucifying Him, shouting out, “his blood be on us and on our children” (Matt 27.25), were only four decades from suffering slaughter as a punishment of God’s wrath. Jesus foretold it in Luke 19.40-44. We know from history that this happened in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem fell to the Romans and there was a veritable holocaust with Jewish blood flowing through the streets.

But there is yet a much more cataclysmic and a universal realization of the capital sentence. This is true

of all natural men, that they are enemies to Christ; and so of all negligent and slothful professors, and ministers of the word, who, when Christ shall come a second time, of which His coming to destroy the Jewish nation was an emblem and pledge, will be punished with everlasting destruction by Him; and then all other enemies will be slain and destroyed, sin, Satan, the world, and death.²⁷

In the wake of this universal judgment, God’s eternal kingdom will be fully purged of all the treasonous and rebellious. Interpreting the parable of the tares in the field, Jesus stated the matter bluntly and literally in Matt 13.40-43, which passage I urge you to consider most soberly.

Christ *will* return, though He has been gone such a long time. When He does, we all *will* give account to Him: true believers, hypocrites, and open unbelievers. You have seen what the outcome will be. Oh, what a great incentive for real Christians to serve Jesus Christ perseveringly “in the meanwhile!” If you are a hypocrite or an open unbeliever, oh how urgent is your repentance! Flee from the wrath to come! Amen.

²⁵ Bock.

²⁶ W. Clarkson in *Pulpit Commentary*.

²⁷ Gill’s *Commentary*.