

On His Majesty's Service

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Living Father, living God, help us to hear your holy word that we might truly understand that by understanding, we may then believe and by believing, we may follow in all faithfulness and obedience, seeking your honor and glory in all that we do.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, friends, as we all know, it is a brand new year and with a brand new year often comes with renewed resolutions. Maybe like me, you know it's time to get your blood pressure and your cholesterol levels down. And we all know what that involves. More exercise, controlling your diet, less late nights. But wouldn't it be nice if we can just skip all of that? Wouldn't it be nice if we can just obtain some vitamins off the internet that will magically get me really fit without the need to go to the gym or to cut out the red meat?

It's really nice to have a quick fix. The people at the beginning of our passage today are also looking forward to a quick fix.

[1 : 22] Now, you have to picture the scene. We are in Jericho, which is a mere 17 miles away from Jerusalem. And from Luke 9 verse 51 onwards, that has been Jesus' destination.

And finally, we are nearly there. And Jesus is approaching Jerusalem just as it's coming to pass over time, meaning that there are plenty of Jews around filled with nationalistic fervor.

So just imagine the atmosphere, especially when we remember how throughout this journey, Jesus has been talking about the kingdom. In fact, it's been the main focus of his teaching ever since Luke 17 verse 20.

Back in Luke chapter 17, the Pharisees asked him, When is the kingdom coming? And Jesus' reply was, It's definitely coming.

You can't miss it. There's going to be a day when the Son of Man will come like lightning in all his majesty and glory. And it is a day you don't want to miss because it is the day when evil will be overthrown, everything will be fixed and God's rule will be firmly established.

[2 : 42] So now that Jesus is just a couple of hours away from Jerusalem, you can see why people might be getting excited. After all, in the Old Testament, Jerusalem, or Zion as Jerusalem is sometimes called, is closely associated with God's kingdom.

It is where God will reign from. And so as Jesus gets near Jerusalem, verse 11, everyone is anticipating the kingdom of God to appear at once.

And that's why Jesus has to begin today's passage by offering a clarification. You see, the people are anticipating a quick fix.

After all, isn't Jesus going to ride into Jerusalem, overthrow the bad guys, and make everything instantly great again? And don't they just need to sit back, relax, and enjoy the show as part of the winning side, right?

And isn't that not just a first century temptation, but also a 21st century one? After all, aren't we just as tempted by a message that says Jesus will come into our lives, instantly make everything great again, and all we have to do is just sit back, relax, and enjoy the show?

[4 : 14] And so Jesus clarifies by the way he introduces this parable. Verse 12, Now, a man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.

Now, his listeners would have recognized the reference straight away. Decades earlier, after King Herod the Great died, his son Achilleus succeeded him.

But in those days, only Caesar himself could officially grant him authority over that jurisdiction. So even though Achilleus began his rule immediately after the death of his father, he still had to make the long journey to Rome, get Caesar's okay, and only then have his kingship formalized.

And Jesus now applies this to himself. Like Achilles, he is about to be crowned king. But this coronation involves a journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, to death, and then up from the grave to his ascension before he returns again.

And here is this big point. This journey takes time. This coronation doesn't happen all at once. In other words, there is a delay between the moment when he is clearly identified as king and the moment when he is universally recognized as king.

[5 : 57] Perhaps one modern analogy might help. In November, Donald Trump was elected as the undisputed 47th president of the United States.

But it was only on January 20th when he was actually inaugurated as president. There is a period of waiting in between. Likewise, the kingdom will come, but first, there will be a time of waiting before it is fully realized.

Jesus must go away first, and then return for the kingdom to come in all its fullness and glory.

That's what he wants us to understand.

In other words, the gist of Jesus' clarification is this. When it comes to the kingdom of God, we need to think long-term, not instant quick fix.

As Jesus has been saying throughout Luke chapter 17 to 18, the kingdom of God, in one sense, is already here, but only in hidden, unassuming form.

[7 : 10] We see it in tax collectors who humble themselves, and blind men who cry out for sight, and little children who come with empty hands to Jesus.

The kingdom will appear in glory one day, yes, absolutely, but that day will not arrive immediately.

The kingdom right now is invisible, low-key, cross-shaped.

So what does that mean for us? It means that we can't conceive of Jesus' first coming as an instant, quick fix. Yes, he has ushered in the kingdom.

His death and resurrection means that we are in the final hours of this present age. Evil and wickedness that characterizes this present age, it is on its last legs, and one day it will be completely defeated.

good. But the new heavens and the new earth are still not yet here. And so that means injustice and unfairness are still here with us, and there is no quick fix for them.

[8 : 27] Or take sickness. Yes, sickness is a result of the curse of sin from Genesis 3 onwards. And yes, Jesus has certainly taken the penalty for sin.

But the time when there will be no more mourning or pain of any sort is still future. There is no guarantee of healing for every illness and every injury in this life.

That will only happen when the new creation comes. There is no necessary quick fix. To promise otherwise is to get the timeline that Jesus has laid before us wrong.

And this clarification helps us adjust our expectations for the Christian life, doesn't it? It means we should think long term, not quick fix.

It's why we shouldn't assume that electing certain figures whom we are convinced will pass the right kind of laws would automatically mean that the whole country would somehow become more Christian.

[9 : 36] It's why we shouldn't be surprised when it takes longer than we think to battle particular sins, or why we might sometimes see little progress despite praying for our unbelieving friend for years.

And it is also why we shouldn't get overly worried when that happens, as if God has somehow failed. No, he has told us already, the kingdom of God is not going to come all at once.

But this clarification in turn raises another question. If the gospel of the kingdom is not about an instant quick fix, if there is to be a waiting for the king to return, what are we to do in the meantime? time? Now, that probably wasn't something Jesus listeners had to consider thus far, since they never expected to wait. But since the king is going away for a while, what are we to do in the meantime?

And that's what the rest of the parable is all about. For after the clarification, there is a command. command. And the gist of the command is this, be on his majesty's service.

[10 : 58] Be on his majesty's service. As Jesus goes on telling the story, he mentions two groups of people in particular. The first group are those who are completely opposed to serving Jesus at all.

We find them in verse 14. They are his subjects. But they hate him. In fact, they hate him so much that they send a delegation to object to his rule.

Now, that sounds like a strange little detail, but it would have made sense to his listeners because once again, they would have remembered that is exactly what happened to Achilles, Herod's son. There was a group who disapproved of him, and so they sent a delegation to Caesar, hoping to persuade him not to give him his stamp of approval.

And Jesus says, in this world, as we wait for his return, we are going to encounter such people. Indeed, we ourselves could very well be those people.

[12:10] We could resist his rule, we could rebel against him, we could say that we don't ever want to accept him. But Jesus is clear. Such attempts are completely futile, verse 15, because Jesus will still be crowned king, just as Achilles was, and returned.

Nothing is going to stop him. And so joining this first group is frankly stupid. But my guess is that most of us in this hall this morning weren't identified with this group, would we?

We don't see ourselves as Jesus haters, who resist his rule. Certainly the original audience listening to Jesus wouldn't have. After all, isn't Jesus talking primarily to people who are eager for his kingdom to come, rather than people who will resist him?

And Jesus knows that. And that's why he now introduces us to the second group of people, the one whom he will talk more at length about. And they are, of course, his servants.

And what are they to do as they wait for their master to return? Verse 13 tells us. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas, us.

[13:37] Put this money to work, he said, until I come back. In other words, go and do business with what I have given you. Now the NIV can be a bit confusing at this point, but just in case it is not clear, he gave each servant one mina each, not ten minas each.

That would roughly be about three to four months' wages. So not a small sum, but not huge either. And the master expects them to put this mina to work.

He expects them to try to get back more than what he has put into the hands of his servants. servants. And these servants, of course, are whom we are meant to identify with.

We are, after all, the servants of the one to be crowned king of kings. And verse 13 makes clear what our instructions are. Go and carry out the spiritual business of God's kingdom as we wait for his return.

Or in the words of a commentator, go and live your Christian life as a trust, taking the truth, the power of the spirit, spiritual opportunity, spiritual gifts, spiritual privileges, everything the Lord puts into your life, and maximize it for his honor and glory.

[15:11] You see, no matter who we are, no matter what our gifts and abilities, we have all been entrusted with one asset, and that is the message of the kingdom.

And we are to be faithful with this message in the way we share it and in the way we live it out. That is the command from our master.

That is what he's looking for. He wants faithfulness. Now, that might not be initially 100% clear when we first take a look at verses 15 to 19.

You see, the king returns home and he sends for the servants to whom he had given the money in order to find out what they had gained with it. The first one came and said, Sir, your mina has earned 10 more.

Well done, my good servant, his master replied, because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter take charge of 10 cities. The second came and said, Sir, your mina has earned 5 more.

[16:17] His master answered, you take charge of 5 cities. So, at first glance, it might seem as if the point is to be like the 10-minah servant and not the 5-minah servant.

I mean, he earned more, right? He gained more for the kingdom. And that can be the point that we are tempted to draw from these verses. But look again at verse 17.

Well done, my good servant, his master replied. Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of 10 cities. Now, notice, what is it that makes Jesus excited?

Is it that the servant has gained 10-minahs rather than 5? No. It is that he has proven to be trustworthy with even the smallest things.

It is our faithfulness rather than the size of the gain that pleases our Lord. And so, whether you have gained 10-minahs or just 5, Jesus is pleased with you if you have worked to be faithful to him and sought to give your whole lives over to making his name known.

[17 : 42] After all, the parable doesn't contrast them with one another. Both are rewarded. Both have done their job. As we will see in a moment, Jesus is not contrasting the first and the second servant, but the first two servants and the third servant.

So, we shouldn't take this parable and apply it in such a way where we might feel guilty if we did not gain as much for the kingdom as a fellow Christian.

The stress is not that one gained more than the other. Rather, the stress is that both were faithful with what they have been given.

And if so, then here's the big question for us, are you being faithful? Are you being faithful in living lives centered on the gospel? You might not be a pastor or missionary, you might not be a small group or ministry leader, but you, like every Christian, have the gospel entrusted to you.

And so the question is, are you being faithful where God has placed you? are you being faithful with the personality you have and the talents that you've been given in promoting the gospel?

[19 : 12] There is someone in our church whom I won't name, so as not to embarrass him. He's got a pretty busy job and plenty of family commitments. But recently, he's gotten to talking to a friend of his, someone who is not an evangelical Christian.

And somewhat out of the blue, this friend indicated to him a willingness to read the Bible and to learn more about Jesus. And so despite his busyness, this person in our church knows that this is a God-given opportunity.

And so every few weeks or so, he makes space in his schedule so that we can meet up and then we work through a Bible study so that he can go on and do it with this friend and his partner.

Now, on one level, he's doing nothing exceptional. You know, it's just opening the Bible with a friend. But actually, what he's really doing is putting his mina to work.

Will there be much gain? We certainly hope so. But what Jesus is pleased with is that he is seeking to be faithful with what God has given him.

[20 : 26] A little thing is a little thing. But faithfulness in little things is a great thing. And here is the thing.

Where there is faithfulness in the little things, there will be great reward. In fact, look carefully and you realize that the rewards given by the Master are actually quite outlandish.

wage. Remember, a mina is about three to four months wages. So let's take the minimum wage. It is currently 1,700 ringgit. So times that by four, and one mina will be 6,800 ringgit.

And so let's round that up to 7,000. Now let's say that the servant invests 7,000 ringgit and ends up with 70,000 ringgit when the master comes back.

Very impressive return. But actually when you think about it, 70,000 ringgit in itself is not that much is it? It can't even buy you a Honda. I think that's right.

[21 : 34] But what does the master say? Here, take charge of 10 cities. Now, I looked it up. Apparently in 2023, the GDP of Sarawak was 142.4 billion ringgit.

Does Sarawak even have 10 cities? I hope you get the point. The reward the master gives is way out of proportion to our effort. When you are faithful with the small things in God's kingdom, you'll get a far bigger investment portfolio to play with when Jesus comes again.

And that helps, doesn't it, to keep us going in His Majesty's service. Perhaps you've been a Christian for decades and decades, but you're beginning to tire, beginning to be tempted not to put the gospel at the center of your life.

But as I tried to show in my seminar on aging faithfully recently, nowhere in the New Testament are older people depicted as inactive or unproductive.

On the contrary, I showed that the Bible says fruitfulness is a possibility even in old age. And this parable encourages us not to take it easy, but to keep going, even when we are old, so that we can hear that well done from Jesus and receive his reward.

[23 : 13] Or perhaps you are someone who has just transitioned into a new season in your life, perhaps from being a student to a worker, or perhaps you've recently become new parents. And it can be so easy with this change of this season in your life not to put Jesus first.

and if that is you, then Jesus wants you to know that the kingdom is still definitely coming. So regardless of your change in circumstances, the mina is still not to be neglected.

And yes, it will be a struggle, but it will be a worthwhile one because the reward will be far greater than we imagine. So whatever little thing you have, your talent, your time, your access to certain resources, whatever it is, use it in his majesty's service.

But that is not the end of the parable. For not only is there a command, there is a caution. We come now to a third servant, and actually he is probably the climax of this story.

You see, remember who is in the audience? It is those looking forward to a quick fix. In other words, it is those who might feel, oh, they shouldn't be expected to wait and to work.

[24 : 43] And mindful of this, Jesus now turns our attention to this servant, verse 20. Then another servant came and said, Sir, here is your mina.

I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. life. So what has this servant done? Answer, nothing. And that's the problem.

He hasn't actually bothered to risk anything for the kingdom. And in so doing, he shows that he actually doesn't care. All he cares about is his convenience.

All he wants is an easy life. Or as the 19th century commentator, Matthew Henry, which is it, it should all be on the screen. It is all the same to them whether the interests of Christ's kingdom sink or swim, go backward or forward.

For their part, they are unconcerned about it. Those who think it enough to say they have done no harm in the world, but who have done no good either, are the servants who store their pound in a cloth.

[25 : 49] And when we have no interest in how Christ's kingdom is growing, what are we really communicating? We are saying we don't actually care about the king.

We don't care what he thinks about us either. We have no love for him. In fact, we might not even have a relationship with him since we don't care what those we have no relationship with think of us, don't we?

And what we might have are just excuses. Listen to this servant in verse 21. I was afraid of you because you are a hard man.

You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow. And we might think to ourselves, oh, okay, fair enough, it's hard to work for a harsh boss.

Okay, he should be excused. But should we really take what he says at face value? Let's take his word for a moment that the boss is really hard on him.

[26 : 57] Then look at his actions in verse 23. Now, if this boss is really what the servant says he is like, isn't that extra incentive for him to at the very least put the mina in a risk-free fixed deposit?

if you are truly scared of this boss, you would work extra hard to at least have something to show for it. But he doesn't bother to do even that.

No, this servant is just making excuses. And we know he's talking nonsense because haven't we already seen just how crazy generous the king is in rewarding his servants, his faithful servants?

The king is nothing like what this servant says, no. The problem is simpler than that. This third servant is simply being straightforwardly disobedient.

Look again at verse 13. The master says, put the money to work. But this servant simply does the exact opposite. He doesn't even try to put this money to work.

[28 : 12] And so here is the caution for us. Are we in the business of living for God's kingdom? Or are we simply in the business of making excuses? Do we simply crave the quick fix?

And if we don't get that, we just shrug our shoulders and say, okay then, I wouldn't bother. And because Jesus is not physically here with us, do we fall into the trap of out of sight, out of mind? It is quite possible that's what happened to this servant. His master is away, and perhaps as time passes on, he begins to think, oh, maybe my master isn't ever going to come back after all.

That's why he doesn't bother. After all, as a friend of mine pointed out, whether he loves or hates his master, if he believes that he is coming back, he will still do something.

But if he doesn't really believe that, that's when he will become bold in disobeying his master. And that really is the central challenge of this parable.

[29 : 32] Jesus is asking us, while the king is absent, what are we going to do in the meantime? will we keep going about his majesty's service?

Or will we start thinking that his absence is permanent and not bother at all? If we do that, Jesus wants us, there are consequences.

In verses 24 to 26, we discover that the mina is taken away from this disobedient servant. the kingdom privileges of serving the king are taken away from him.

And why not? Because actually, he is now in the very same category as the subjects earlier. Remember them? They hated the king.

They resisted him. And well, this servant, by his actions, proves to be no better, doesn't he? He accuses the king of being a hard man, verse 21, but really, he is describing himself.

[30 : 40] The king himself says the same in verse 22. You wicked servant, he calls him. For by his attitude and actions, he shows himself to have zero relationship with King Jesus in the very first place, just like the haters.

And that is a tragedy. because, verse 27, the fate that befalls anyone in this category is grim indeed.

So here's a question that we must consider. Who are you? You might not consider yourself an enemy of God, but of the three servants, which are you?

Are you the first or second servant, faithfully living for the kingdom as best as you can? Or are you the third servant who might be associated with the king and his household, who might even hold some responsibility in the church, but who ultimately don't want to bother with him and his kingdom?

are you living for him? Or are you making excuses to live for yourself? These are not my questions, but the questions posed by Jesus himself through the telling of this parable.

[32 : 09] Or perhaps you are kind of in between. Perhaps you are someone who many years ago you went to some Christian event and when they asked you to put up your hand and say a sinner's prayer to get saved?

Well, you did so. That's what you did. But really, ever since then, you've just sat back. Perhaps that is because you didn't know better. No one really taught you that you are to be on his majesty's service, going about doing his business.

And if so, this parable is also for you. And it's a reminder that being part of his kingdom means serving while he is absent and actually zero desire to serve in any way might actually put a question mark on whether you truly heard or understood the gospel at that Christian event many years ago. Or perhaps today, as I'm confident many of you are, you guys are the first two servants. But it has been a long time and it doesn't look like Jesus is coming back anytime soon.

And you're getting weary, getting discouraged, especially when you're living in a world where you know there are subjects who hate him. And it's tempting to stop putting that mina to work, just to leave it in the ground, pursue other things instead.

[33 : 38] Well, this parable is here to encourage you. It's here to say that the king's physical absence is not evidence that he is not actually coming back, or evidence that what you are doing is completely worthless.

Rather, it is a chance for that mina of yours to make gains for the kingdom as much as possible. And so having heard Jesus' clarification, command, and caution, let us humbly listen.

Let us be on his majesty's service. Let us be those who declare, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And let us wait patiently so that when he comes back, we are more than ready to receive his well done, good and faithful servant.

Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, I just pray that as we reflect on this parable, help us to let its central message sink into our hearts.

I pray, Father, that if we are in danger of becoming the third servant, we would hear the caution that is contained within this parable today, that we would repent and change our ways and be ready to put the mina that you have given us to work.

[35 : 18] Father, if we are people who are a bit tired, we have been the first or the second servant, but it is getting a bit worrisome, burdensome, I pray that you would refresh us again, remind us that serving you is worth it, that there is a great reward in the future, and there is a great reward even now serving you.

And I pray that we will keep encouraging one another with this word, so that we will all make it to the end, and we'll be all ready to joyfully meet you when you come back.

We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.