

Coming to Jesus the Second Time: Giving Account at the Final Judgment Luke 19:11-27

In our culture, if stores and organizations want to stay in business, they must please the consumer. The customer asks, "What can you do for me?", and chooses the provider who supplies the most benefit at the least cost. Culture inevitably infiltrates faith, and religious consumers ask God, "What can you do for me?", and choose the provider who supplies the most benefit at the least cost. So churches are under pressure to spin the message of Jesus, highlighting all the benefits he brings to his followers, and minimizing the costs or expectations that he places on them. Sometimes, proponents justify such profane strategy in the name of 'grace' or 'forgiveness'. Jesus, in contrast, talks not just about what he brings to us and does for us, but also about what he expects of us and what we are to do for him. Not just about grace and forgiveness, but also about responsibility and service. He also explains what happens to those who do not meet his expectations. Such matters are the focus of this passage.

Day 1: Luke 19:11a "While they were listening to this"

While they were listening to *what*?

To Jesus grant sight and salvation to a blind man (18:42), and social acceptance and salvation to a tax collector (19:9).

The two respond by committing their lives to Jesus and to others: the healed man follows Jesus, while the tax collector gives half his wealth to the poor. From these case studies it is clear – albeit implicit – that those who receive blessings from Jesus rightly respond by worshipping him and living by (and doing business) by his standards.

Luke is not satisfied with making this point implicitly, through case studies and role models. So he cites Jesus' explicit teaching in this parable. The point of juxtaposing the healings with the parable? Jesus does not just offer blessing and salvation, without entailment.

Grace is free: we do not merit, and cannot earn, healing, forgiveness or salvation. God gives without regard to who we are, what we have done, or what we deserve. Yet once we have received his blessings, we are under obligation to use them in worship of God and in service of others.

What skills, abilities or opportunities has he given you? How are you using – or how can you use – these to honor him and to serve others?

Day 2: Luke 19:11b "He [told] a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately." While this half-verse may seem to be a passing note, Luke likely intends it as a thesis sentence: Jesus told this parable *because* ... Apparently

he intends two different reasons, not just one. The first reason – “because he was near Jerusalem” – anticipates the rejection that Jesus is about to face; he speaks to opponents in 19:11,27. The second reason – “because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately” – anticipates his followers remaining behind for an indeterminate period after his death; he speaks to their situation in 19:13,15-26.

In both respects, this passage provides an important balance to the previous two case studies. When Jesus healed a blind man, observers shouted God’s praise (18:43). When the tax-collector repented, Jesus declared him saved *today* (19:9). So an observer or a reader could facily conclude that when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to declare that God’s reign has begun, he will heal all and meet with widespread acclaim. So this account guards against excessive optimism: despite Jesus’ mighty works, the kingdom has come *in part*, it has not yet come fully; some will rejoice in his presence, others will oppose him.

We are in the same position as his first followers were. We celebrate the salvation that we possess already, while recognizing that we will not experience full health, prosperity and blessing until a future day. We can expect and pray that many will receive Jesus’ touch and welcome him enthusiastically. At the same time, we should not be surprised when some object to his absolute claims and strong demands, as they did in his own day.

Day 3: Luke 19:12-19 A proportionate reward

Jesus tells two versions of this parable, one here, and the other in Matthew. Since the details differ, so do some of the emphases. So we want to keep the two accounts separate in our minds.

In Luke’s version, when a nobleman travels on a long journey, he entrusts each of ten servants with one ‘talent’ each (roughly three-months wages for a blue-collar worker). He instructs them to invest the funds and provide a profit on his return. After some delay he comes back. He asks the servants for an accounting: two report excellent returns: one, ten-fold; the other, five-fold. Each is rewarded generously and proportionately.

Neither Jesus nor Luke explains the details, what this will look like concretely. What kinds of rewards exist in the next life? Isn’t entering heaven a pass-fail test? Isn’t heaven itself the reward? We cannot say. But this much is clear: he is a kind master, who generously rewards diligent and productive servants, corresponding to their efforts and results.

This truth can easily drop off the radar of our daily lives. We have so many competing demands on our time – demands which also typically reward us according to our effort and our results – that short-term urgencies often override long-term consequences. Realistically, the demands of job and boss are more immediate and pressing, and are daily reinforced. As a result, our

jobs often take most of our energy and time, leaving little for family, and even less for God. Here Jesus reminds us that God generously rewards any time and effort that we carve out to serve him and to contribute to his work.

Day 4: Luke 19:20-26 The risk of no return

Luke distinguishes the two productive servants with a third. The former both put in effort and achieved sizeable return. The latter did neither. Instead, he cast aspersions, blaming his master for his own passivity and lack of productivity. His master used his own words to condemn him, taking away the original capital and leaving him with nothing: "To everyone who has [a return on investment], more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away" (19:26).

Neither Jesus nor Luke tells us exactly what this forfeiture entails. Some hope that it means nothing worse than entering heaven by the skin of one's teeth, i.e., not forfeiture of salvation, just loss of heavenly reward. This interpretation, though, is overly optimistic: in Matthew's version of this parable, the punishment is eternal judgment: "Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 25:30). Ultimately, it is clear enough from Luke that the outcome is highly undesirable. That warning should be sufficient motivation to serve God productively in this life.

Here Jesus reminds us that we live not only to thrive in this life, but also to thrive in eternity. The amount of time and energy that we have for service of God and ministry may never approach that which we necessarily spend on earning a living. Still, we want to be sure to carve out time for God and for ministry, because we eventually give account for how we have invested what he gave us. The consequence of having nothing to show for this life is severe and intolerable; it is to be avoided at all cost.

Day 5: Luke 19:14,27 The penalty for opposition

Luke's version of the parable includes a fourth group, not present in Matthew. In fact, this group forms a frame around the parable, appearing at both the beginning (19:14), and the end (19:27). In addition to the three sorts of servants, Luke introduces the nobleman's subjects: "His subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king'" (19:14).

Strikingly, such an event had occurred in Jesus' childhood. In 4 BC, after the death of Herod the Great (the king who tried to kill the baby Jesus), a politician named Archelaus traveled to Rome to seek appointment as king over Judea. A delegation of Jews followed in his wake, opposed to his candidacy due to his history of violence (including suppression of a riot, resulting in the death of 3,000 Jews). Archelaus won appointment to a lower position, and

returned to exact revenge against his opponents. Eventually, in AD 6, the emperor deposed and banished him for excessive brutality.

Jesus' allusion to this event is breathtaking. He compares himself with Archelaus, and his response to opponents at the final judgment to Archelaus' slaughter of his opponents: "As for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and slaughter them in my presence" (19:27). This is clear warning that a final judgment is coming, and strong motivation to us to pray for those who oppose Christ, while opportunity remains for them to repent.

Day 6: Luke 19:11-27 Conclusion

We readily embrace the Jesus of 18:35-19:10 who comes to heal the blind, to befriend the tax collector, and to save both the socially marginalized and the ethically corrupt. We readily embrace the Jesus of 19:16-19, who extravagantly rewards those who productively serve him. Yet we are fundamentally uncomfortable with the Jesus who threatens judgment of the useless and destruction of opponents. But Luke – and Jesus himself – affirms both, and in succeeding incidents and passages. Can we affirm the former, yet reject the latter? If we must affirm the wrath of Jesus, is there nothing we can say that takes the edge off?

First, and most obvious, while Jesus may be like Archelaus in his wrath, Archelaus is never like Jesus in his grace. Ultimately, God holds all accountable for their response to Jesus, because Jesus has done so much for us. None of us gets worse treatment than we deserve, and all of us are offered far better (provided we accept the offer, and comply with its conditions).

Secondly, much of our discomfort with this attribute of Jesus carries over from our political culture. We have a president, not a king; a peer, not a ruler. We can mock him in jokes, and criticize him in public. Any rival can make outlandish and unsubstantiated claims against him. Most important for present purposes, he has to please us to earn our vote; we need not satisfy him.

Jesus never describes himself or God as a president (though he does call us his friends). Instead, he is king, emperor, slave master ('lord'). Even the word 'gospel' means not 'good news', as if often claimed, as though it precludes the possibility of judgment, but refers instead to the installation of an emperor. Though the notion may be uncomfortable for us, the logic is unassailable. Jesus is king: uncharacteristic of a king, he dies for his people; but like any king, he deals decisively with those who reject or oppose him. We love him for his kindness, friendship and grace; we serve him as king and lord.