

Part 68: Responses to the King

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One of my favorite movie lines is from the 90's film, "The Matrix." There's one scene where this weak and nerdy Neo had entered the Matrix and he is about to participate in a training fight where he will most certainly be defeated. But before the fight starts, they download packets of information into his brain and all of a sudden he says, "I know kung-fu." I remember taking Greek in seminary and just wishing that I could have the same experience! It shows us the power of knowledge to transform our lives.

Maybe you have similar desire, what if we could download into your brains the answers to your qualification exam, or the details of who you will date and marry, when you'll have kids, or what is wrong with your health? We would expect these answers to transform our lives.

But the pastor and author A.W. Tozer once said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

We could learn kung-fu, and it would certainly shape our lives. We could begin to think about our study habits differently and it would influence our calendar—and hopefully our grades. But Tozer's idea about our thoughts on God find their true warrant in the parable Jesus shares with us today. What we know about Jesus will inevitably be the most profound shaping force on your life—for better or for worse.

Our passage in Luke today comes as a correction by Jesus regarding what people were already thinking about him. Luke tells us in verse **11**, "As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately."

This parable is going to help the crowds understand in more clarity the nature of the kingdom and the timing of the kingdom—but more specifically how those realities shape the life of a disciple. My prayer is that it will do the same for us today as well.

Now, out of all the parables in Luke so far, this is one of the more difficult ones to understand. There are certainly some parallels between a parable of a returning king, and next week's passage where Jesus enters into Jerusalem. But more than focusing on that entry, this parable focuses on Jesus' re-entry, when he comes back after his work on the cross.

If we are not careful in studying this parable we might have some wrong conclusions. Perhaps on hearing it read for us you might conclude that this parable calls us to work in order to receive salvation, or perhaps it presents a demanding and petulant Jesus, maybe you find it as the biblical justification for capitalism, or maybe after reading about judgement and slaughter your only conclusion is that it was an odd day to try a new church.

But the point of this parable is incredibly clear for us this morning. What Jesus wants to show us is that **Faithful servants wait while they work for their faithful king**. What you think about the king and his kingdom shapes the way you live.

To better understand this point, we are going to do a lot of Bible study of the text today, so I encourage you to have your Bibles open in front of you as we seek to first examine the **Tension of the Kingdom**, then we will see **Responses to the King**, and lastly we will conclude with a brief **Application for Today**.

So to begin let's by examining the scene of this parable where we see the **Tension of the Kingdom**. Before we look at the basic plot, we need to be introduced to our characters. First, we are introduced to a nobleman, who by the end will become a king. What we learn most about this man is his title: he is a noble man. This speaks to his heritage and his honor. In other words, if he were a horse we'd say he's well-bred—his parents were of a high class, but also of noble character, his quality and character was in line with his heritage.

Second, we'll see he has some servants who are already under his rule. And lastly we see there are some general citizens who understand that they also would be under this man's rule.

Those are the characters but here's the plot in four parts.

First we see a **delay**. Verse **12** tells us that our nobleman had to go into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom. Here's where historical context is helpful. When Jesus says he's going to "receive a kingdom" he's going to the seat of power in order to be affirmed as king publicly so he can go back to his land with full and recognized authority.

This was how things worked back then, especially under Rome. In fact only a handful of decades before Jesus shared this parable, Herod the Great had to travel to Rome in order to be officially be given kingly power over Judea. Right around the birth of Jesus himself, Herod's son did the same thing but with a noticeable distinction that we will see in a moment.

But this is where the tension of the parable is established. Given the political and transportation systems of the day, it would have been nearly impossible to know when this king would come back with full recognition of his status. The assumed tension was: when will the man come back as king, and what will life be like for his subjects in the meantime?

In his absence the nobleman gave his servants a **duty**.

Vs 13, reads "Calling ten of his servants he gave them ten minas, and said to them 'Engage in business until I come.'"

So notice here that the nobleman gives these servants seed funds and start-up money. He empowers them to do business and he defines faithfulness as using the gifts he's given to produce something more until he comes back.

This would have been a normal Middle Eastern practice of the day and would have been not particularly noteworthy apart from what we read in verse **14**, "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'"

Here we see the **danger** of the story.

This soon-to-be king was an opposed king in the midst of a hostile people. There was a highly mobilized and organized force of opposition who didn't not like the king and did not want to submit to the rule of the king.

Jesus is actually alluding to a recent political event in his own day where Herod's two children each went to Rome to appeal for the right to rule. As Archelaus went to the far country of Rome, his brother Antipas sent a group of hostile delegates alongside him trying to slander Archelaus' authority. By the end of it, it was Antipas who was given the lesser title which brought not only shame to his supporters but political tension and hardship.

So the presence of these citizens would have immediately been seen as both a political and a physical danger. In such a climate as this, if you're guy lost the bid to the throne, your public identification with him could put you on the wrong side of the sword. If the angry citizens succeeded, the servants would be in danger.

In light of this tension the king says that upon his return there would be a **deposition**. When the king comes back, everyone is called to account. You can pick a side, but in the end, the lines will fall firmly. How you lived in light of this king would define everything. It's this day of account that most of the parable focuses on.

And what Jesus draws out in this deposition is specifically the response each of these groups of people had to the king and his claims to the throne. What did each of these groups believe about the king? To borrow Tozer's line, "What were their thoughts on God? This is our second point this morning:

Responses to the King.

Now even at this point, I imagine most of us have picked up that of all the characters we should want to be the faithful servant. But the truth is, we see and know very little about those servants. In fact we don't know for certain what they did with their money. But what we do know is that Jesus affirms them as "faithful" in verse 17.

This is part of the power of parables. They often make the point by showing off negative space. If you're familiar with graphic design you may understand this more, but we've all seen it. How many of you have seen the FedEx logo? Have you noticed that between the "E" and the "X" is a blank space between the letters that looks like an arrow. The designer didn't draw an arrow, but they drew our attention to the arrow by highlighting what framed it.

Here we don't really know much of what the faithful servants thought, but Jesus does show us much of the thoughts and hearts of those who are around them. On one side, we have the hostile citizens, and on the other side we have the wicked servant. In both of these groups we see language which reveals what they believe and what they think about the king.

So let's examine that negative space by walking through the citizens, the faithful servants, and the wicked servant.

First, notice how the **citizens hated the king**. This posture of heart is what Luke draws our attention to. **Vs. 14** says they hated him so much so that they stirred up a delegation who traveled those long and winding Middle Eastern roads deriding the nobleman. Why? Because, "We do not want this man to reign over us."

There is a willing, passionate, obstinate heart in these people. They do not want this king because they do not want to accept his reign. Over the years, I have talked to many people who would say this very thing about Jesus. There may even be a few of you in here today of this mindset. And if that's you, I'm so glad you're here and I would love to talk more with you if you're interested. The pages of scripture and church history are filled with people just like you, who have been gripped by the grace of God, granted forgiveness through Jesus and made to love that which they once hated.

But for those of us who do not have this specific heart right now—here we see the real danger of life in this world. In a mysterious sense God has allowed the voice of the hateful citizens to ring loudly in this life. The most prolific voice is the voice of rebellion. When the nobleman left, the servants engaged in business but the crowds engaged in influence. It would be wise of us to recognize that this is the case. The world is not neutral or passive towards the king Jesus would seek to be in your life.

One day, as we will see in the end, the hateful citizens and their puppet king will be thrown by the true and living king into the pit of hell. But Jesus is making it clear that day is not yet. The king is still seemingly far off. Jesus himself calls Satan in John 12 (31), “the ruler of this world.” While Christ is on the throne even today, Satan is on the streets, his crowds are loud, and while they cannot harm a risen savior, they may wish to harm his faithful citizens.

This is why it's so important to recognize Jesus' call for discipleship and participation in the local church. This world does not want anyone to follow Jesus—so we must realize our call to help others do just that.

This is where we now turn to nobleman's faithful servants: **loyal to the king. Luke 19:15-19**, "When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'"

So here are the first two guys who show up, one guy made ten times more, and another guy made five times more, and each are rewarded with a number of cities to match the minas they handed back over to their king.

Now, before we begin to compare and contrast our works with the works of others—notice what Jesus says. He doesn't affirm their productivity (though that's implied). Instead he affirms their faithfulness. Their master doesn't greet them and say, "Wow, you really could have done better." The master didn't take that kind of approach. Why is he so happy? Because they were faithful. Faithful to whom? Faithful to him. Faithfulness always yields fruitfulness—never the other way around.

One scholar of the Middle East put it like this. Imagine if you were in a place like Iran where there is great political instability and hostility. What if your prince left to go seek the throne and said, “Keep operating the family business. Keep the sign up, keep publically representing my name, keep affiliating with my wellbeing and my claim to the throne”?

Well, imagine if you did that only to find out your prince lost the struggle. Who would stand out to the opposition as the first to be oppressed or eradicated? Probably the very people who stood as his faithful representatives. We will see even before Jesus is crucified the disciples scatter when it seems the power

is shifting. Even Peter will try to distance himself from his relationship to Jesus. The voice of the citizens are loud. But these men's faithfulness was louder.

This faithfulness was nothing more than a bold conviction regarding the ruler they knew.

At the end of the day these servants were not successful in regards to money, but they were faithful unto the king. They took the risk, they opened the doors, they engaged in business, and they were met with the king's favor.

But now we meet the most complex character. He is neither a citizen, nor is he a faithful servant. But we read of him here **Luke 19:20-27**.

Here we meet the wicked servant. Even though he was called a servant, his judgement is tied to the hateful citizens. Even though he gave the master back exactly what he was given, he was judged as no servant at all? How is this fair? No harm no foul? What went wrong?

Here is the subtlety of sin. The book of 1 Samuel shows us that not all hate is clearly perceived. There are subtle ways we too, claiming to be servants, can reject Jesus as king.

This parable isn't about the money, it's about our view of the king. Where the citizens hated the king, and the faithful servants loyally served the king, the **wicked servant refused to believe the king**.

What do I mean by that? Well I mean his actions can really only be explained by his refusal to believe in one of two realities concerning the king. He either didn't believe in the power of the king or in the character of the king.

The first option is that he didn't believe the king would come back. He didn't trust the strength, the power, or the claim of the king to win the battle for the throne. I went to a football game once between my team, the Tennessee Titans and the Denver Broncos. I went with some friends, and one of my friends wanted to support me in my affection for the Titans so he wore a Titans jersey. But after the Titans lost, and the fans were offering all sort of free counsel to us on the way out, my friend took off his jersey. Why? Because it wasn't worth the cost of association.

This man wanted to avoid such a potential—so instead of taking the jersey off completely, he hid himself from any sort of public association in the event things went wrong. But he hedged his bet, in the event the king did win and did come back he would hide the jersey in the ground so that he could offer it back to the king as a sign of his loyalty.

Aren't there many of us in here who at times have found ourselves with the same fear? It's not that we don't want Jesus to be king like the angry mob, but we can see a reality in which we may want to keep a second king on speed dial in case things go wrong. We might want to follow Jesus just until that allegiance requires us to declare our hostility to things like public perception, wealth, comfort, dating...etc. We will serve Jesus up to a point, but there are clear boundaries where we will not necessarily reject Jesus, but we'll bury what's his and hide our jersey.

One commentator put it powerfully when he said this: **"There are really only two ways to take a thing seriously. Either you renounce it or risk everything for it. Either you fling away your pound or you use it and trade with it. There's no third choice. The kind of Christian who is merely conservative and**

those who want only the Christian 'point of view'--those people want this third choice, which doesn't exist. Throw your Christianity on the trash heap, or else let God be the Lord of your life."

The only reason he would choose to do this is if he didn't believe the King strong or faithful enough to return.

But the King did come back didn't he. And now he has to justify why he didn't invest the minas which reveals that he not only misunderstood the king's power, but the king's character.

When we begin to defend ourselves against God, it never ends well. Here the servant, shocked but not without a plan, at the king's return offers an excuse. **Luke 19:21**, "I knew you are a strict man, taking what you did not deposit and reaping what you did not sow."

So what's wrong about this? Well first, he is kind of insulting the king—he makes the king sound like a thief who just takes what's not his. Second—he's admitting what the king expects while simultaneously admitting that he didn't do what the king expects!

He says, "You wanted more—so I hid it." The master says, "I'm going to condemn you with your own words! If you claim you knew me, but didn't obey me, then you don't actually believe me."

"If you would have just believed me, if you would have just taken what I gave you and invested it, you would have made interest—you would have been met with commendation not condemnation!"

This man instead feared the king and in so doing, was condemned by the king. But what did he fear? He feared the king was a severe man. Is the king severe? Yes! We see that in the judgement he will give to all who reject his rule. He will order the slaughter of the wicked. This man is severe, he is black and white in regards to sin. When he comes back there are only two options: condemnation and commendation.

But how easy is it for us to fear God partially, and how severe the implications of that may be. This king is severe. But we were not first introduced to a severe man, but a noble man! Don't we see even in this story that the king's judgement is severely just towards the sinner, but severely generous and gracious towards the faithful!

In fact remember what happens when the king takes this servant's minas and gives it to the servant who had 10? What did the crowds say? They protested because it's not fair! The man already has ten. And what does Jesus say, "To everyone who has, more will be given."

Jesus' condemnation of the sinner is fair, but his grace towards faithful sinners is not. The first servant didn't make any more minas, but he was awarded more. And remember what the master said when he doled out the rewards: "You have been faithful over very little—so you shall be over ten cities."

My three year old has been faithfully learning how to ride a bike and I'm proud of her. But you know what, I'm not putting her in the driver's seat of a car. But this is only a fraction of the overabundant reward Jesus gave his faithful servants! Scholars debate how much a mina was worth at most the 10 minas was a year's wages, at least it was three months—but it's hardly worth 10 cities!

But the reward of grace is disproportional! You see there are many of us who wrestle to serve Jesus well because we have a flattened view of Jesus. You may fail to live your life in light of Jesus because you say things like, "You'll always only be angry, I'll never do enough, I'm just going to mess it up!" But you are condemning yourself with your own words!

Never, never, never, never in scripture would Jesus ever turn to even the least who come to him in faith and say: "You wicked servant." So the center of Jesus' parable here is not how much you made for the king, but what you believed of the king. Faithful servants work while they wait for their faithful king.

Here's where we can land the plane today: **Application for today.**

Jesus is making it clear, faithful servants work while they wait for the faithful king. So what do we do here? We examine our own thoughts on our king. He is coming. He will win the battle. And he will call us to account. So what do we do?

We first realize what the king has given to us. The good news of the kingdom of Jesus is that he, Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. The gospel is Jesus' gift to those who are underserving.

This parable show that we are not saved by what we earn, but by what we are given.

Notice what the faithful servants didn't say. They didn't say: "Lord I took your mina and made more!" Look at the text! What do they say? **Luke 19:16**, "Lord your mina, had made ten more."

Brothers and sisters this is not a story of those who earn the gospel and those who don't. It's a story of those who receive by faith the power of the gospel and submit themselves to the king and those who never had it. That's what Jesus says, he says of the wicked servant, "the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

The power to save us, the power to separate us from condemnation and set us apart for commendation is the very gift of Jesus Christ himself.

So what do we do now with such a gift? We labor faithfully in his power. The minas will do the work, will you? Will you realize that your king is coming back and that he has given us a duty in that time?

You may worry that the crowds are loud, that the danger is real, but the king will return!

You may worry that others might look better, that growth might be slow, that we may only produce interest, small progress, but doubt not the character of your king! Your faithfulness is not judged in regards to the crop, but to the king.

So let us set up our tills, let us trade openly, for we have been given a job to do, we have been given the power to do it, and we have been given the promise that one day—our king will return and hold out for his faithful the joy of mercy and the affirmation of grace.

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