

HOW INVOLVED ARE YOU IN THE BUSINESS OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

by Ron Ritchie

I am amazed at the spiritual impact that the film *Jesus* is having on the world these days. Several years ago, a group of men, producers, writers, actors and investors came together under the encouragement of Campus Crusade for Christ to make a film based on the life of Jesus Christ, from the gospel of Luke. The first film was made to be shown to English-speaking audiences around the world. It soon became apparent that there was an audience for the film in more languages. Today, it is available in 140 languages, with more on the way. The most amazing thing to me is how our risen Lord moved in the hearts of these producers with the timing of this movie, for, once the walls of Eastern Europe fell, they were ready to show the film to millions in their own languages. Then when the godless rule of the Soviet Union came apart, they were prepared to show the film to the Russians in their own language. Only eternity will reveal all the fruit that was born in the kingdom of God because of those faithful men and women who had a vision and would not stop until all the world saw the true life of Jesus.

And that is the subject we want to address as we turn to Luke 19:11-27. How involved are we in the business of the gospel of Christ? For...

We have been called to invest in the kingdom

And while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" (Luke 19:11-14)

"And while they were listening to these things..." Jesus was ministering in Jericho, on his way to Jerusalem. Living in that commercial city was a rich man named Zacchaeus, who was the Romans' chief tax collector. He apparently had heard about Jesus' healing of the two blind beggars. Being small in stature, he found it necessary to climb a tree in order to see Jesus because of the crowds that had gathered around him. As the Lord passed by and looked up, he saw Zacchaeus and said, "...hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house."

Jesus was saying, in effect, "I must stay at your house because I want to show my disciples that, despite how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, with God all things are possible" (Luke 18:23-27). Jesus was saying, "I must stay at your house because I want to show my disciples that 'The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.' I must stay at your house in order to illustrate once again how my disciples should invest their lives in spreading the gospel of salvation in the difficult days ahead, before my second coming. The stakes are high--the spiritual battle for the souls of men, women and children is intense, and the rewards have to do with eternity."

During our Lord's stay at Zacchaeus' house, the crooked tax collector came to the realization that Jesus was the Christ of God. He repented of his sins and placed his faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. "And while they were listening to these things..." says our text. What are the "things" Luke is referring to? "Today salvation has come this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham," said Jesus. The things that he wanted his disciples to understand were of eternal importance: His ministry and message; the same things he wants us to invest our lives, resources, spiritual gifts, natural talents and time in--the things of the kingdom of God.

Jesus went on to tell them a parable because he was near Jerusalem and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. Our Lord was approaching the final days of his journey on earth. He was now in Jericho, some 17 miles west of the Holy City. Luke wrote in 19:51 that, some 12 months earlier, while ministering in the country of Perea (modern Jordan), Jesus had "...resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem." A few days before entering Jericho he had told his disciples, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished" (18:31-33). But, as you recall, in verse 34 Luke told us, "And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said." As we can see, the disciples still did not understand the full extent of our Lord's plans to go to the cross. They still did not fully understand the reality of the spiritual kingdom of God. They thought that the stage was set for the Lord to suddenly appear and reveal himself to the nation at Jerusalem, and that he would then do something to assert his authority--take the reins of the Roman and Jewish government in his hands, declare himself Messiah, break the yoke of Rome, set the nation free from oppression, and bring in the righteous blessings of the kingdom of God in power and glory on earth. Jesus had made Israel a genuine offer of the kingdom in his day if they would receive him as the Christ of God, but they rejected the King and his kingdom, so the literal fulfillment was postponed until the second coming. The spiritual offer remains, however: "The kingdom of God is among you," in the person of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (17:20-21), for the followers of Christ in every generation are to continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven," in and through us until he comes again. Thus the need for the parable.

"A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself and then return."

The Jewish people were familiar with this kind of event, for during the childhood of Jesus, Herod the Great had gone to Rome to be declared king over the Jews. So when our Lord used this parable the people could at least identify the situation. Now when Jesus said that the nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, he had in mind all the horrors of his arrest, when he would be delivered up to the Gentiles. He would be mocked, mistreated, spat upon, scourged, and eventually he would die on the Roman cross for the sins of humanity. His death would be followed by his burial in a borrowed tomb, his resurrection, ascension and the promise of his second coming.

"And he called ten of his slaves and gave them ten minas, [gold coins] and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.'"

At this point I would like to mention that this parable, and the parable that our Lord would teach his disciples on Mt. Olivet two days before the Passover, have some similarities and some differences, but the main spiritual principle remains the same (Matthew 25: 14-30). The Lord was going away and he called his followers to himself and gave each of them some of his money to invest in certain opportunities in order to advance the cause of the kingdom. When he returned, he would have a time of accounting, followed by a time of rewards for faithfulness and punishment for unfaithfulness.

The key to this parable is that, since the literal kingdom of God will not come on earth for a long while (as signified in the phrase "a certain nobleman went to a distant country"), the nobleman called his ten slaves to himself and gave each one a gold coin (equal to the pay one could make in 100 days). They were to go out into the marketplace with the master's money and look for a variety of ways they might invest it so as to make a profit for him. It was not their money, but it was their responsibility to invest the master's money until he came back.

In the immediate context, our Lord was instructing his disciples and all who would follow him in the days ahead, that while he was away they were to do business with the gospel, i.e. they were called to spend their lives, their time and spiritual gifts sharing the good news of the kingdom in the same manner that he had just shared it with the two blind men and with Zacchaeus. Note that each man was given an equal amount of money to invest, meaning, we all start out with the same opportunity. The challenge is, how well do we invest it, how risky are we with it, and what adventures are we willing to take with the Master's message of salvation? The apostle Paul encouraged the Ephesian Christians, "Redeem the time for the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). He encouraged them to buy up time, to make the most of their days in an evil world for the stakes are high: the eternal life of man or his

eternal death. Moses understood this reality when wrote in a song to the Lord and to the people of Israel, "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, ...so teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom...and do confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands" (Ps. 90).

"But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after Him saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" In the historical context, we know that King Herod died when Jesus was a child. In his will, Herod divided his realm between three of his sons, all of whom in time went to Rome to press their claims to be declared king. Archelaus, who had built a palace in Jericho, had left Judea with the title of king, but the people detested him for they remembered that when he ascended the throne as their ruler, he had some 3,000 Jews massacred at the Passover Feast. So they sent 50 representatives to Rome, and these were met by 8,000 other Jews, to ask the Romans not to declare him their king, but to convert their country into a Roman province. Rome agreed with the Jews and gave Archelaus the power of rule without the title of king. This was well demonstrated in the Jewish context among the Pharisees and scribes. John the apostle would write of Jesus, "There was a true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1: 9-11). Later, the Jews would accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Luke 11:14-20). In future messages we will see how the Jewish leadership would try to have Jesus killed during the Passover in Jerusalem. Eventually they would send a delegation to Pilate, the Roman Governor, asking for Jesus' arrest and death. When Pilate brought Jesus out before the mob, he said, "'Behold your King!' They therefore cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priest answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'" (John 19:14-16).

Last Sunday afternoon, a longtime friend came by my house. This woman was excited because she wanted to share with us how God had blessed her family. She was in our singles ministry several years ago until she married a Christian man from that group. They had one son, but soon after his birth the doctors told her that she would not be able to bear any more children. They really enjoy their son, but deep within them they had a desire for more children. Finally, two years ago a door opened up for them to go to Romania to adopt a child from one of those terrible orphanages we see on TV. With the help of Brian Morgan and his Romanian contacts, her husband encouraged her to go over with another couple to adopt not one child but two. Once she arrived she went straight to the orphanage and saw firsthand many abused and neglected children lying around in cribs. She chose two little girls, and then the difficulties began--a stolen passport, lack of water, paperwork, seeking the missing birth mothers for their signatures, language problems, fear, depression, anger, hope, and on and on it went. Finally, several weeks later she arrived in San Francisco with two beautiful Romanian girls, and they were met by a joyful and supportive husband. Out of that most difficult experience she and her husband have written a manual to help other couples adopt children from Eastern Europe, and they now know that some 17 other children have been adopted by Christian parents since their very trying adventure in Romania. What an investment in the "business of the kingdom" for the King of kings!

How involved are we in the business of the kingdom of Christ? We have been called by our risen Lord to invest our lives, time, experience, natural talents, spiritual gifts and financial resources, and walk through open doors of opportunity. Some of these spiritual opportunities are right in front of us--they are the lives of men and men who live, work, and share a common life in this community. Others are in different parts of this country or overseas. Some are risky investments and others are not, but our risen Lord wants us step out in faith and spread the good news of his gospel by word and deed until he returns.

And when he does return to earth ...

We will be called to account for our investment 19:15-27

"And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done. And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a

very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' And another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did now sow? Then why did you not put the money in a bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' And he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.' I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in my presence." (Luke 19:15-27)

"And it came about that when he returned after receiving the kingdom..." Paul wrote to the Philippians that, following our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension, "God highly exalted [Jesus], and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (2:5-11). Jesus was declared King by his Father when he ascended into heaven, and he has been given all the power and authority over affairs in heaven and on earth. His invisible spiritual kingdom has been in place all these years, and he has been bringing that kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy by the power of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all the men, women and children who have placed their faith in him as their risen Lord and Savior. But, as this parable illustrates, he will return on this earth and set up his kingdom on earth. This is beautifully demonstrated in Revelation 11:15-18: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven saying: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, 'We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Your bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.'"

"And the nobleman ordered that those slaves to whom he had given the gold coin be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done."

Remember that each slave was given an equal amount of money to invest in the business of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world in which they lived, with the full reality that one day, the nobleman declared, the king would return and call for an accounting. When the Lord was speaking to the seven churches in Revelation, he said to the Christians in Philadelphia, "He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 'I know your deeds. Behold I have put before you an open door which no one can shut...' (3:7). These are doors of opportunity for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of spiritual warfare. And these first century Christians were faithful to "redeem the time" for the gospel.

The first slave appeared before his king and with great joy said, "Sir, I took your one gold coin and I invested it in the business of the kingdom and made ten gold coins." The king replied, "Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities."

The same thing happened with the second slave who took the master's money and increased it fivefold. He was rewarded with being given rule over five cities. All of our spiritual opportunities to do business for the kingdom on this earth is a "very little thing" in light of eternity, but it is an important thing on earth, because our King asked us to take his money and do business with it. The faithful slaves did not realize until that moment that they would be rewarded by the king, for they were motivated by a desire to be obedient, not to be rewarded.

Jesus said that when he returned to this earth to set up his physical kingdom his faithful followers would rule with

him in a variety of ways. The disciples were promised that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (22:30). Paul would remind Timothy, "If we endure we shall also reign with Him" (1 Tim. 2:12). Later, John would write to the church of Thyatira, "...hold fast until I come, and he who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to Him I will give authority over the nations" (Rev. 3:25-26). When our King comes again in judgment, he will come as the ruler over the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:7), and the faithful slaves in character and deed will rule with his authority over the cities and nations (Rev. 2:26-27) on earth during his thousand-year reign in righteousness; and this may even refer to ruling with Christ in the new earth (Rev. 21: 24).

The rewards of authority will be equal to the responsibility we assumed on earth. Each of us is given a gold coin to invest in the kingdom business. The one who makes ten more gold coins will be given authority over ten cities, another, five cities, another, two cities, etc. So the faithful will be rewarded in terms of future responsibilities, added trust and increased work, as well as the enjoyment of doing all of it by the power and for the glory of our visible and present King, Jesus Christ.

The king now calls for an accounting from the third of ten slaves. This slave had problems: He was disobedient to the master's wishes. He said, "Your mina (gold coin), ...I put away in a handkerchief." He is saying, "I had many opportunities to invest in the kingdom of God, but I did not because I was afraid of you. You are an exacting man, always try to get blood out of a stone. You reap money from others without working for it." As we can see from this parable, this was not true of the character of the nobleman. This was the distorted view the slave had of his master, and this view fear crippled and paralyzed him.

You and I know of men and women among us who tell us that they are followers of Jesus Christ. We know that, like us, they have been given talents, spiritual gifts and time to invest in open doors of spiritual opportunities for the King and the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth and in heaven. But because they have a distorted view of the King, they have been disobedient; they have hidden the gold coin that he has given them and they have lived wasted lives. In contrast to this distorted view of the nobleman now declared king, we have our Lord's words to his disciples on the night he was betrayed, "This is My commandment that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves; for a slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends....You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit (in Christ-like character and good works) and that your fruit should remain; ...this I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:12-17).

Here is the master's judgment on this slave.

"You are a worthless slave. You have developed a distorted view of my character and ministry, so I will judge you based on your view of me. If you so feared me, why did you not at least put the money on the table of the money lenders and it would have made interest on its own?"

So his money was taken away from him and given to the first slave who had invested the king's money wisely. In this parable it looks like this slave fits the text of John 15:1-4, when our Lord told his disciples on the night before he was betrayed by Judas, "I am the true vine and My Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away, [Judas] and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me and I in you. And the branch cannot bear fruit itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:1-4). Based on other parables like this (Luke 12:41-48 and Matt. 25:30), this servant may not have been a true follower of Christ. If he was a spiritually paralyzed believer, he may fit the description, recorded by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:10-15, concerning the judgment seat of Christ, "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

Now we come to the spiritual principle.

"And they said to Him, 'Master, he has ten minas [gold coins] already, if we give it to him he

now we come to the spiritual principle.

"And they said to Him, 'Master, he has ten minas [gold coins] already, if we give it to him he will have eleven.' I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have even what he does have shall be taken away."

The nobleman had ten slaves and he gave each one of the same amount of money to invest in the things of the kingdom until he came back. Two of the ten faithfully invested the nobleman's money wisely and both received not only the approval of the master, but also rewards which were never mentioned beforehand--the privilege to rule cities in his kingdom. But the money that was given to the unfaithful slave by the nobleman to invest in the business of the kingdom on his behalf would be taken from him and he would be left with nothing. That money would be given to the faithful men and women who had already wisely risked investing in the kingdom of God. Paul wrote to encourage the Ephesians: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (2:10).

I was in a meeting with some elders last Wednesday, and we talked about the many men and women in this body who are giving of their time, assets, money, gifts and talents to the business of the kingdom. We are thrilled at how many men and women among us are taking a serious look at their lives and their work and making decisions to invest more of their lives in the business of the kingdom of God and his wonderful plan of redemption. At the same time we realize that some of you have been given your "gold coin" by the King to invest in the kingdom, and that you have, out of fear and a distorted view of our Lord, put his money in a handkerchief and you are living out your lives in fear of him. It is important that we encourage you to spend some time with the Word of God so that you can get a true view of our loving and gracious King, and ask yourselves if you really have a spiritual relationship with him. If you do, you should be investing his money and the talents and spiritual gifts he has given you in the business of the kingdom until he comes again. When he comes, will he find you investing your life in the lives of those around you, or will he come and find you wasting your life and the resources he has given you? (Luke 18:8).

Verse 27: "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them. bring them here, and slay them in my presence." This was a warning to the leaders and people of Israel who had rejected Jesus as their Messiah and King. It was a warning to Judas and to everyone in every generation who have refused, who are refusing and who will refuse to have Jesus become King of their lives and set up his rule within their hearts. Here is their final destiny: "a place of darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This is the second death of Revelation 20:14-15, called "the lake of fire," where they will suffer eternal punishment.

How involved are you and I in the business of the gospel of Christ? In this parable it was his money, and he expects us to obey him by investing all of it in his business. He has called us to invest our lives, natural talents, spiritual gifts and time into his plan of redemption. This can be expressed in a variety of ways, but it must be expressed. God wants to deliver men and women out of the kingdom of darkness and bring them into his wonderful spiritual kingdom of light in and through us, in the same way he delivered the two blind men and the tax collector in Jericho. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost." And there are so many around us who are lost. We need to ask our King to open our eyes to see those for whom he died and then ask him to empower us with the courage to invest our lives in his business on their behalf so that in the end we can hear him say as he once said in Jericho, concerning Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham." Our motivation should be that of love for our King Jesus, and a desire to obey his commands. If we are fully his servants, we can be assured that one day, when he returns, we will hear those wonderful words, "Well done! Come and reign with Me forever."

If you have invited Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, you can be assured that he has given you one of his gold coins to invest in his kingdom business until he comes again to set up his rule on this earth. How are we doing? What a sobering question! Let's pray for ourselves and others around us that we are doing what he expects us to do until he comes again--growing in our spiritual character and investing in good works which he has prepared for us to walk in.