

**+ Luke 19:11-27 + The Promises of End Time: Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant! +**  
**+ 3rd Sunday of End Time: Last Judgment + 10 November 2013 +**

What came to mind when you saw the words “Last Judgment” on the cover of your worship folder or when you noticed the picture of Jesus in judgment over two different groups of people—one rejoicing, one weeping. What came to mind? I think it would be pretty safe to guess that your first thought wasn’t, “Wow! This is my favorite subject to hear about in church!”

Were they unpleasant thoughts? Fearful thoughts? Nervous thoughts? Hopeful and confident thoughts? We confess that Jesus **“will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead”** (Nicene Creed), but the subject of the judgment coming on the Last Day is not typically something we like to talk about. It makes us nervous, maybe even a little scared. Deep down inside you and I know why it makes us nervous, especially when you consider who we really are by nature—sinful human beings who actually deserve that judgment from our holy God.

Not surprisingly, many try to ignore that subject or at least hope for a more pleasant, though unrealistic alternative. Some even try to deny that it’s actually going to happen...but then you read a section of Holy Scripture like we have before us here in Luke 19, and you realize that Jesus talks about the last judgment. He doesn’t dismiss or deny it. He doesn’t offer an easier, more pleasant alternative. No, he talks about it with his followers and with us, because he knows his people need to hear about it before it comes.

Why would Jesus do that? Why would Jesus take the time to talk about something so naturally unpleasant? Parents, who love their children dearly, know that their kids might sometimes need to hear what’s unpleasant for their own good. In the same way, Jesus talks to us today about the Last Day. He wants us to be ready for his return. He wants us to be faithful with the gifts he graciously gives us before he returns, and he wants us to be confident that when he returns, we’ll hear from his lips, **“WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT.”** So let’s listen to what Jesus tells us.

Eighteen miles—only 18 miles were left between Jericho and Jerusalem. Only 18 miles separated Jesus from the final act of his grand plan to save a world full of sinners. At the end of those 18 miles would be crowds and courts, suffering and death, a cross and a tomb. Jesus knew what was waiting for him 18 miles ahead. He had spoken of it to his disciples repeatedly. While he was in Jericho, he had even told a tax man named Zacchaeus why he had come. **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”** (19:10) Jesus had no illusions of what lay ahead.

Many, who were traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem in a rapidly growing crowd of Passover pilgrims, were under a different impression. “We’re traveling with the Messiah. We’re traveling with the king. The kingdom of God is coming soon, and we’ve got front-row seats to see Jesus topple the Roman government and establish an eternal kingdom of our own. We’re traveling with the king, and the kingdom of God is coming with him.” Their hope was wrong. So Jesus made one more attempt to make them realize what was really coming by telling them a story about a nobleman.

**“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.”** Now this wasn’t some kind of hostile takeover, but instead a fairly common practice in Jesus’ day. When there was no ruler in an area, a nobleman might approach the Roman emperor to make his case to rule that area. Hopefully, he would be appointed king and would return to govern.

Before he left, this nobleman **“called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas”**—one per servant, about three months’ wages. He gave them a simple instruction, **“Put this money to work...until I come back.”** Since he was going to be king soon, he wanted to test them for greater responsibility.

With that valuable gift entrusted to his servants, the nobleman left, but not all was right in the kingdom. **“...His subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’”** His enemies detested him and definitely did not want him to be their king, but their opposition was pointless. **“He was made king...and returned home.”**

Now it was time to evaluate how his servants had performed with the minas he had entrusted to them. Would they prove faithful and trustworthy? What would he find? He would **“find out what they had gained with it.”**

The first servant confidently approached the king and told him, **“Sir, your mina has earned ten more.”** This servant had faithfully turned three months’ wages into thirty months’ wages. He had faithfully carried out his master’s command, and his master was overjoyed. **“Well done, my good servant! ...Because you have**

**been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.**” This servant would govern ten cities, because he had been faithful with a single mina! He didn’t know what the master was going to give him, if anything, but his master graciously blessed him.

A second servant approached the king and told him, **“Sir, your mina has earned five more.”** Again the master was overjoyed. **“You take charge of five cities.”** He too didn’t know what the master was going to give him, if anything, but his master graciously blessed his faithfulness.

One more servant approached the king, but he wasn’t confident like the others. He held a mina in his hand wrapped up in a piece of cloth, but it was the same mina his master had given him before he left. Rather than put it to work, this servant had disobeyed his master’s command and did nothing with the mina. Now he had to explain why he had so foolishly and so willingly disobeyed the king’s command. The excuses came pouring out. **“Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 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.”** Not only was this servant disobedient, but he was also making public accusations about his master to his face. Whether or not they were true (and Jesus never tells us), this servant was accusing himself of being disobedient by excusing himself for not using the gift entrusted to him.

The king was enraged. **“I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?”** “Even if your accusations were actually true, why would you do nothing with that money?” The unfaithful servant had no response. He was no better than the king’s enemies, and judgment was coming.

The king **“said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’”** At first, they objected at what seemed unfair. **“Sir...he already has ten!”** Yet the king had a just reason and swift judgment for all his enemies. **“I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them...”**

You can imagine the stunned silence of the crowds listening to Jesus as he finished this fearful story of the coming judgment. There wasn’t going to be some happy overturning of the Roman government coming soon, but the One, who was about to prove himself King of kings by his death and resurrection, would be coming again in glory to judge with holiness the faithful and the unfaithful, the living and the dead, the righteous and the unrighteous.

This parable is frightening to our ears too, but it’s a story we need to hear as well. The fact is, Jesus needs to confront us with this warning about our own opposition and unfaithfulness. Jesus makes it crystal clear that all who oppose him and his Word and all who are unfaithful to him and his Word will certainly face eternal judgment on the Last Day.

His words, **“for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away”**, fill our hearts with terror. You see, those who oppose Jesus and the teaching of his Word in this life ultimately have nothing in God’s eyes. They are his mortal enemies and deserve his wrath and punishment. The same is true for those who are unfaithful to Jesus and unfaithful with his Gospel treasure. In God’s eyes, those who are unfaithful have just as much as those who oppose him—nothing, nothing of merit, nothing of note, only coming judgment and condemnation. Because every one of us has a sinful nature that is naturally opposed to Jesus and his Word and is naturally inclined to be unfaithful to Jesus and his Word, this story naturally terrifies us. Have I taken God’s Word for granted? Have I done nothing with it? Have I disobeyed or failed to obey God’s Word? The fear of judgment looms large.

...But our Lord in his grace doesn’t leave us with judgment. In spite of our natural opposition against him and because of his undeserved grace, he has made us his servants through faith in him. After all, he became King for our sake. He remained faithful to God’s holy will when we could not, and he loved us so much that he even gave up his own life to make us his own.

Now because of his undeserved mercy, Christ entrusts us with his Gospel treasure. On the pages of Holy Scripture, Jesus reveals to us his grand plan to rescue us from eternal condemnation. He makes us his own through the water and Word of Holy Baptism, transforming us from enemies to servants. He refreshes us with forgiveness for our opposition and unfaithfulness in his Holy Supper, and then our gracious Lord even blesses

our faithful, trustworthy use of his Gospel treasure. He gives us that simple command, ***“Put it to work until I come back.”*** So how do we do that?

We faithfully share that good news of sins forgiven through Jesus. We faithfully teach and preach that Gospel message. We study it faithfully. We live it faithfully—not because we have to, but out of thanks for his gracious mercy. We faithfully put that gospel to work knowing how great of a treasure it really is, and by doing so, we serve our returning King faithfully.

Time and again, our King proves himself to be ever generous and merciful to those who are faithful in service to him—not because we’re so great, but because of his own undeserved mercy and love that makes us faithful to him. As we diligently use his gifts, he blesses our use. He blesses us, and he effectively works in the lives of others so they too can enjoy his gifts. Rather than make excuses, we have every reason to serve Him faithfully!

When all is said and done, our Lord and King will come again in glory. He will judge the living and the dead. Those are facts. Those are reality, but we need not fear the final judgment. Instead as faithful servants of the Lord, made faithful by his empowering Gospel, we can be confident when that Last Day comes. Our Lord has given us so much already. He has so much more awaiting us in the eternal glories of heaven. In his grace and because of his grace, he will tell us, ***“Well done, good and faithful servant!”*** May our gracious Lord and almighty King keep us faithful to him until the end. Amen.