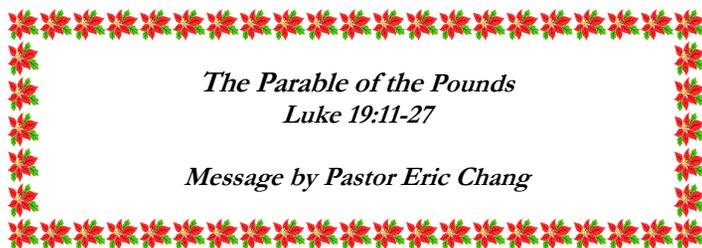


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The Parable of the Pounds
Luke 19:11-27

Message by Pastor Eric Chang

We continue in our systematic study of God's Word in the teaching of our Lord Jesus. We have now come to the last of the parables in the Gospel of Luke, in Lk 19:11-27. This parable is generally known as the Parable of the Pounds. It actually lines up with the last of the parables in Matthew, it is very close in content to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew Chapter 25.

The Lord Jesus used parables for his preaching because they served as a kind of illustration of some vital spiritual truth. The important task for us is to understand that truth that the Lord Jesus wants to convey to us – not to preach around the text, but to get right into the text – and let Jesus speak to us his life-giving word.

Lk 19:11-27 reads as follows:

“As they (i.e., the disciples) heard these things, he (i.e., Jesus) proceeded to tell (them) a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.”

At this time, the Lord Jesus was probably in or near Jericho, which is only about 17 miles away from Jerusalem. The Jews commonly supposed that the kingdom of God was about to come, and the disciples were deeply influenced by the general Jewish thinking. (Even after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, as he was about to ascend on high, the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, “Are you now going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” They were still thinking in earthly terms at that stage.) Now the Lord Jesus, by way of answer, gives them this parable:

He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants (which indicates that he had quite a lot of servants), he gave them ten pounds (that is, one pound each), and said to them, ‘Trade with these till I come.’ But his citizens hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying (i.e., when he went to get his kingdom, they sent an embassy after him saying this), ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ When he returned, having received the kingdom (in spite of the objections of those citizens who did not want him to reign), he commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading (i.e., by doing business).

The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your pound has made ten pounds more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your pound has made five pounds.’ And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your pound, which I kept laid away in a napkin...’

The word ‘napkin’ actually means a scarf, a cloth; it is not the napkin in the sense that some people use at the table to wipe their mouth with after dinner. This napkin is actually a cloth which they put over the back of their neck, or a scarf which they tied around their head with. The idea was to protect the back of the neck from the sunshine. In hot countries, you do not want the back of

your neck to be exposed to strong sun; otherwise, you might get sunstroke. So, this was the meaning of this word translated here as ‘napkin.’ V21 continues:

‘...for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.’ He (i.e., the master) said to him, ‘I will condemn you out of your own mouth, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money into the bank, and at my coming I should have collected it with interest?’ And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the pound from him, and give it to him who has the ten pounds.’ (And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has (already got) ten pounds!’) ‘I tell you, that to every one who has will more be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine (i.e., his citizens), who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.’”

Spiritual Lessons from Life Situations

Now this is a parable taken from the life of that time. The Lord Jesus used parables from situations which were well-known. He did not concoct the parable in some artificial way; he took an incident that people would know about, or some happening in life that they could see with their own eyes round about them. Then he drew out from these the spiritual lessons which he would have his disciples to learn.

Thus, in answer to this question whether the kingdom was about to come, his answer of course is quite explicit. The kingdom was not going to come until he himself went away to receive the kingdom and then come back again. He would have to go away first and come back again. That coming back again is what the Christians call the Second Coming. The First Coming is when he came at what is commemorated as Christmas and the Second Coming is when he will come again. What the Lord Jesus is saying, to put the answer very plainly, is this: “The kingdom of God will not come immediately because, first, I have to go away, and after a period of time, I shall come back again. That is when the kingdom of God will come.”

But immediately he turns from this speculation of when the kingdom comes to the practical concern of service. This whole parable is about service. He is saying to his disciples, “You do not have to sit there and take out your electronic calculator and work on the approximate time of my coming. There is so much

work to do that you attend to what needs to be done in the meantime. Occupy yourselves! Get on with the work! My coming will be soon enough, and so, get on with the work.” The Lord is always concerned with the practical reply.

Background to Understanding This Parable

Now there were, at this time, certain incidents which would very much be a parallel to this parable. You see, the situation was that Palestine at the time, the land of Israel, was occupied by the Romans. So, whoever ruled in Israel had to get their authority from Rome. That is the background to understanding this parable. You could not just appoint your own king in Israel because the Romans were in authority. Under the Roman general Pompey, the Romans conquered the land of Israel in 63 BC. From 63 BC onwards, Israel was under the Roman power which no nation in the world could withstand at the time. The Roman legions were legendary for their military prowess, their power of conquest. No army could face them in the field; they defeated army after army. They conquered the world. That included, of course, Palestine, which could never raise a force that could match the Romans, since no other nation, even more powerful nations, could face the Romans on the field. This meant that any ruler in Palestine, if he wanted to have kingly power, had to seek the authority from Rome. For example, Herod the Great became king only on the commission of the Romans, of course. And Herod the Great in 40 BC, that is, some 23 years after the Romans had conquered the place, in order to become king, had to go to Rome and request authority to rule in Palestine. The Romans granted him permission and he became king, King Herod or Herod the Great.

Herod’s sons also became ethnarchs. (An ethnarch is a sort of regional king.) For example, Archelaus, ruled from 4 BC to 6 AD, a relatively short time, got his permission to be ruler in a certain part of Palestine through the Romans. In fact, there is a real historical background to this parable. This event must have been quite fresh in the minds of the Jews at the time because Archelaus had had to do this very thing, namely to leave Palestine to go to Rome to plead with Emperor Augustus Caesar of the Romans to confirm his father’s will, that is, the will of Herod the Great who had died shortly before. In the will, Herod had appointed Archelaus to be king as his successor. But, of course, Archelaus could not be king just because his father had given him the kingdom. He had to go to Rome to the supreme emperor to receive confirmation of the will and permission to get his kingdom, that is, his kingship. He did not go there to get a piece of land; he went there to get the authority to be king. The kingdom here means his kingship, his kingly rule.

When Archelaus went to Rome, a whole embassy of Jews who hated Herod the Great didn't want him to be king because Herod the Great was a very cruel, a rather nasty kind of person. You need only to read the accounts concerning Herod, he was a man who murdered his wife, murdered his children, he would murder anybody, virtually, who got in his way. He knew he was hated and had been afraid that nobody would ever mourn for him when he died. He feared that there were going to be celebrations on the street. And so, he had thought about killing all the leaders of Israel so that there would be mourning in the land at the time that he died even if they would not mourn for him. As it turned out, when he died, there was celebration all the same because the order to kill the leaders was not carried out. This was the character of Herod. Archelaus was not much better. In fact, he did not have the ability of his father, though he had his cruelty. So, when Archelaus went to Rome, to get his kingdom, the Jews sent an embassy after him saying, "We don't want this man to be king. We had enough of his father; he is not much better so we don't want this fellow to be king." However, their plea was not accepted by Augustus who appointed him king nevertheless, though with reduced powers, by way of compromise. He appointed Archelaus but reduced his area of authority. So, this is the background to this parable. The Lord Jesus, using this story and turning it around, as it were, draws a spiritual lesson out of this.

God Is the Supreme Authority

What is the picture? The picture is very easy to understand. The Lord Jesus is saying, "I'm going away to the Father to receive the kingdom." Immediately the spiritual lesson comes forth. You see, the supreme authority for affairs on this earth is not here but in heaven. God is the Supreme Emperor. If man thinks that he is his own boss, that he is the master of his own fate, that he is running this world, well, he is mistaken. The world here is simply a colony of heaven, as it were. The supreme authority lies in heaven. Just as the authority in Palestine was not derived locally, just as the authority was with Emperor Augustus Caesar, with the enormous might of the Roman power.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus is saying that none of the affairs on earth is controlled by the kings of the earth, by even the Herods of the time; the final authority is with the Heavenly Father, with "Shàngdì" [上帝], the Emperor Above, the Supreme Authority. So, that is the first lesson that immediately comes out of this parable. The Lord Jesus locates very clearly and firmly that the center of authority is heaven – the fundamental place of authority – of all the things that go on in this world. Heaven is where the events are decided. That is where the fundamental authority is. That is the first thing. This means

that whatever is done on earth is going to be accounted for in heaven.

Herod could be called to account at any time by the Roman Emperor. In fact, Archelaus was dismissed and sent into exile because of the complaints brought against him. He had not ruled properly. The Romans, finally, were fed up with this and they threw him out. He was exiled in about 18 AD. He was sent in exile to Gaul, which is in modern-day France. So, you see, the kings of the earth can rule for a time, but only for a time. How quickly their authority vanishes! One leader is replaced by another leader; one king is quickly replaced by another king; and the whole power structure changes. Some new person – some new face – takes over.

We have been seeing something of this kind in Canada. Political scenes can change quickly too. When I was watching the elections, it struck me how a leader – so powerful as long as he is leader – can suddenly be powerless the next moment. He was sitting there as Prime Minister, and suddenly, the next moment, he was a nobody, just plain Mr. So-and-so. Suddenly he is out of the picture. And somebody else who was just a Mr. So-and-so a moment ago has suddenly become Prime Minister. Then, after a few years, the picture changes again and he is back to plain Mr. So-and-so, and so forth. It seems that there is power, and yet, not much power. Herod was a very powerful king. Yet, on the other hand, he was quite powerless under the Roman establishment. So, let us remember this lesson: God is in control fundamentally. He reigns!

The World Does Not Want God to Reign

Now the rest of the picture is also very easy to understand. What is the territory in question here? Well, the question here is about the earth. Who are the citizens who do not want him to reign? It is the people in this world; they do not want God to reign. They do not want God to reign even if it is through Jesus.

You see, the fundamental protest against Herod, and admittedly Herod was not all that good a king, yet, the hatred was not so much merely aimed at Herod, but that he represented the Roman power. Now Herod was himself not a Jew; he had some Jewish blood but he was an Idumean. And that is all the more reason why they did not like him that much. They hated him because he represented in many ways the Roman power and the Roman interest.

Today we find much the same thing. We find that the world does not want God to reign over their lives. They want to do their own thing. Everywhere everybody wants independence. That is the cry of today. We do not want other peo-

ple to reign over us. But, of course, you can take it to further and further limits.

In Switzerland, there is a little canton up in the mountains with a very, very tiny population. They also want independence from Switzerland. Now Switzerland is about the most democratic country in the world, but that is not good enough for them. They have their own representative in Parliament; that is also not good enough for them. They want independence! And you wonder what this place would accomplish with independence. Well, who knows? It is our natural inclination that we want to be our own boss. And we are prepared to carry this to quite astonishing lengths. I have been trying to understand what this independence issue is all about and I must confess I have rather failed to understand exactly what they will accomplish.

Imagine this tiny country with its few thousand people – it is going to have its own prime minister, or president, whatever he is going to be called. He is going to have an army of about say, 35 people? He is going to have this enormous economic power of a few farms out there. I do not understand exactly what they want to accomplish. But who cares! As long as they can say, “I am independent”? Presumably, that little canton, that little place in Switzerland can indeed accomplish something. You know Switzerland is small enough, with a population of about five or six million people. Here, this canton is so small. If you look in a world map, you will have trouble finding Switzerland. It is so tiny on the world map. And then, of course, you will not have the slightest chance of finding this canton on the map, because if you cannot even see Switzerland on the world map, how would you find this canton? You will have to get a map of Switzerland well-magnified and you will see that up in the north-west corner of Switzerland, that tiny area, there is this place that wants independence. They are even throwing bombs to get independence up there. Now it seems that human nature is like this. We always want independence.

In fact the Romans’ coming to Palestine brought them a measure of security, which Palestine had not enjoyed for a very long time. The powerful countries that surrounded Palestine, Egypt in the south and Syria in the north, had been giving Israel no end of problems. They had been squashed in between these powers. They had been at each other’s throats for a very long time. The Romans came in and brought a certain measure of peace, the ‘Pax Romana’, the Roman Peace and gave them a certain measure of protection. But, of course, that is not good enough, because they were Romans. Not only was there peace and economic prosperity and a measure of self-governance and freedom under the Romans, they even had their own kings – but all this was not good enough. Peace or no peace, economic well-being or no economic well-being, they

wanted independence. It seems to me that in the world, this is the mentality that we have. This is what they would call patriotism. Of course, there is much of great value in patriotism. I myself am certainly very patriotic.

The World Wants Jesus As Savior but Not As Lord

But we have to consider the question: Why does the world reject God? Why do they reject Jesus whom God appoints as King? What is the reason for it? Well, because he is going to be King and we do not want him to rule over us. Now notice that the question here in this parable is not whether or not Jesus could be our Savior. The question is whether Jesus can be our Lord. They are saying, “We do not want this man to reign!” Oh, we are quite happy to have him as Savior! I mean, when the Jews were in trouble with the Egyptians and the Syrians, they were very happy to see the Roman armies appearing to save them in the nick of time. They were very happy. But it is, “So long as you just come save us and go away; when we need you, we will call you again.”

That is the kind of Christianity I see in the world today. Well, it is wonderful to have God. When I am in trouble, I will say, “God, help me. I’ve got trouble now. I’m going to have exams. I’m going to fail now. Please, help me. You do something to that professor. If necessary, cause his eyes to get blurred. And then I’m going to get good marks. I’ve got to get through this exam; I can’t face my parents. So, God, please help me.” Suddenly, before the exams, everybody becomes very pious. Everybody rushes to church. Everybody puts the money in the offering. Why? You have got into a mess. You have trouble; you need someone to save you! And when you pass your exams today, you say, “Okay. Thanks, God. You can go back now. It’s finished now. Thank you. Next year when I have exams, maybe I’ll look for you again. In the meantime, I’m going to do my own thing.” Next year, they fail the exam and they say, “God, what did you do to me? I mean last year – one year ago – I put my money in the offering. Last year I went to church and I read my Bible. I even prayed for two minutes in the morning. And now, look at what has happened! This is impossible! You can’t treat me like this.”

And so, I have people coming to me, querying, “Why does God treat me like this? Why does God do this to me?” Oh, so, we want to make use of God. “God, you save me but don’t reign in my life, okay? Why do you always want to reign in my life?” When the Egyptians came to attack, the Jews said, “Ah! The Romans are my friends. Great! Let the Romans come! The Romans armies – they are marvelous!” But when the Egyptians had been defeated, the Syrians had been defeated, and there was no more danger, they said, “Romans,

get out of here! We don't want you to stay here!" That is the kind of Christianity we are talking about.

The World Is Happy to Have Religion in Moderation

Therefore, for evangelists to preach salvation is very easy. Who does not want to be saved? "Do you not want to be saved from your sorrow? Do you not want to be saved from your misery? Do you not want to be saved from depression? Your loneliness? Come to God!" So, the evangelist has a wonderful time because who does not want to be saved? You just preach salvation and you say, "Raise your hands." Lots of people raise their hands. I mean, you are offering something for nothing when you preach like that. That is a good deal. Better than that you cannot get! It is an offer that cannot be refused. I mean, something for nothing. No sale can compete with that. In Hudson's Bay & Co., [a Canadian departmental store] they only offer 50% discount at the maximum. When they give you 30% off, that is not too bad, but free of charge?! Imagine if the Bay said, "Tomorrow – one day – everything will be free in the Bay!" I think the whole building will come down! People would be knocking the walls down before they could start to open the doors! Huh! Something for nothing! So, I am not at all surprised when the evangelist says, "There were 100 decisions or 2,000 decisions." I mean, what is the big deal? I could preach like that too. When you make offers like that, who would not make 'decisions'? You have got nothing to lose. You get something for nothing.

But when it says God is to reign in your life through Jesus, you say, "Hey! Wait a minute. There is a catch there. This I don't like too much. I like to run my own life. I don't want anybody telling me whether I can go to the disco or not. I happen to like the flashy lights in the disco. I like loud music, that way I don't hear all these people nagging me. The music drowns out the sound. That's what I like. I run my life here. Nobody can tell me, 'You can't do this and that.' If you leave me alone and don't try to run my life, then that is okay for me."

This is the kind of problem here. The issue is: people in this world are quite happy to have religion – in moderation! They say, "Moderation – I mean, like alcohol. If you drink a little bit, it is not too bad. It is good for the stomach from time to time, but not too much. I mean, too much alcohol is bad for anyone. So, religion is the same. You have a little. Everything in moderation." What do you mean by moderation? "Moderation, by definition, means you have Jesus to be your Savior. That is okay. Who is objecting to that? But you say, 'God is going to reign in your life through Jesus.' Oh, that is letting the

alcohol get to your head. Now the alcohol is controlling you; you are getting drunk! No, no, no! Nothing of this sort! We have got to be moderate, you see. Moderation!”

The World Wants to Make Use of God and Religion

This is the whole key to this problem. The key of this parable lies exactly here. It begins about this nobleman and it ends with those men who do not want him to reign. The world does not want God to reign through Jesus. Well, you can have Christianity. Look at the number of churches. You come into this country, just look at the church spires. I go to some towns in Canada and it seems to me that it must be that half the town lives in the church because I see churches everywhere. One spire here, another spire there, church spires are everywhere to be seen.

If you did not know Western countries, and if you went to Europe or England or wherever, you would think they are the most religious people. The whole place is full of churches. After all, what do you see when you go on tour as a tourist to France? You know, I have seen so many churches in France, it came to a point that I felt, “I’m not going to see another church. I’ve seen too many churches!” Every village, every town, the only historic place to look at is . . . what? The church, of course. So, you go there and you see people. This person died here and another one was buried there. If you go to Westminster Chapel in London, what do you see there? It seems like it has become some kind of a graveyard. Maybe it speaks something; you seem to be walking over everybody’s tombs. And so, you try reverently to walk around this tomb only to find that you have stepped on another one. You look down at the floor and say, “I’m sorry! I shouldn’t have stepped on you there.” Maybe we Chinese have some kind of reverence for people who have been buried. Apparently, they are all buried there in the nave! You have got to walk over these stones in order to get anywhere in the church. There is another one there – somebody lived from this year to that year and died there. Another one died there. And you say, “What is this? Is this the house of the living or is this the house of the dead?”

God is the last resort! In most Western countries, you have God – it is very good because when you are born, you get christened, so you get a few drops of water on your head. You go on further in life, you go to church for the second time in your life, that is, when you get married. After all, God has his uses. I mean, the church has its place in life, three times at least in life. And then when you get buried, even if you do not know it, you get buried in the church, too.

This is religion; that is as far as they are willing to go with God.

Religion has its uses. It is a unifying force; it serves to bring people together. Especially when you are faced with Communism and you have not got an ideology to face them with, then you have the church. Let us talk about God, especially when the Communists come. And when the Communists go, just forget about God. “We have done our job. We have got rid of the Communists.” So, there are uses for religion. As long as man can make use of religion, he is going to have some religion. That is okay.

The World Prefers Anarchy

They are the same people who say, “But to have him reign in my life? Oh, no! That is another story. We do not want this man to reign.” They might not say it as loudly as that. They might not put it in those words, but the Lord Jesus is looking into their heart. That is why in John Chapter 1, it says, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” [v11-KJV] They do not want him. They do not want this man. They do not want Jesus, not because he is a hard man like Archelaus, but their thoughts are, “No matter who, no matter how good the authority, no matter how good the system, no matter how good the ruler, we do not want him.”

That is why I said I was trying in vain to understand this place in northwest Switzerland. Switzerland is so democratic a country. It is the first democracy. Everybody is a soldier. Everybody has a vote. Everybody can decide something or say something. And to opt out of this system, I do not understand it. What do they hope to gain? They have a better way? No! It is just that they do not want any authority, no matter how good that authority is. No wonder we have anarchists. Anarchists are people who do not want any sort of authority. Basically, I suppose, deep down, the only authority that we accept is our own. I have seen that in every Christian at some stage or other. We want to be our own boss. That is the fundamental problem.

True Christians Are Servants of God Living Under God’s Authority

But, there are those, and the numbers are not so great, who are the true Christians. What are true Christians? These are the servants of God, as they are called here. Servants of God! In 1 Pet 2:16, we see that every true Christian is a servant of God. This does not just refer to pastors, or preachers. “Servant of God” means every true Christian, because he lives under God’s authority, that is why he is a servant. They are the ones who say, “God is King in my life and

Jesus is Lord of my life.” If you say that, you do not have to be a preacher; you are a servant of God.

The parable then goes on. In the midst of this hostile situation, when his citizens are in a state of rebellion, he calls these ten servants to him and he entrusts them each with one pound. Now, what is a pound? Well, a pound is estimated to be equivalent to about three months’ wages of an average laborer. So, it is about 100 drachmae or denarii. If we put it in modern terms, if you reduce it to financial figures of £5 or £6, or \$10 or \$20, there is no great meaning. It is rather like the situation today. When you speak about \$10, the question is whether you are talking about \$10 in Canada or \$10 in China. The same \$10 in China you could live for a month on, but in Canada, you could hardly get by for a day. And so, when we reduce these figures into modern terms, they do not make much sense. What it does say is: one pound would be equivalent to about 3 months’ wages for an average laborer of that time. This means that if you translate it into Canadian terms, and if you ask how much a laborer earns these days, maybe supposing he earns \$1,000 a month, then that would be equivalent to a fairly sizeable sum of maybe \$2,000, \$3,000.

Every Servant Starts Off with One Pound

Thus, each one of these workers – these servants of this master – is given a pound. The Lord Jesus is then saying, “In this world as it is today, every one of you who is a servant of mine, who acknowledges my kingship, is entrusted with a pound, that is, with a certain commitment, with a certain responsibility.” Now we as Christians all have been entrusted with certain responsibilities. If not, we would not be Christians.

What does a Christian have? What have we been entrusted with? Well, each one of us, to start with, has been entrusted with life! That is a very big responsibility. What are you to do with your life? We have been given new life in Christ. Becoming a Christian has to do with life. It is a matter of life and death. It is not a question merely of belief, a question of religion. If you just have religion, you are not a Christian. You may have the Christian religion, but that is not a Christian according to the Biblical definition. A true Christian is somebody who has life! Have you got life? The life that comes from God? When you have the Holy Spirit of God living in you, you have eternal life!

So, all of us who are servants of Christ, who acknowledge his kingship, his lordship in our lives, have life: this divine life, not the physical life, the spiritual life that comes from God. We have the Holy Spirit. We have been given,

entrusted with, the message of truth. We do not just have life, we can even pass this life onto others. This life is not just something we keep for ourselves; like physical life, it can be passed on to others. To your children, you pass on your life. What does your child get from you? Life! Spiritually, too, we can pass life onto others and not just keep it for ourselves. So, we have been entrusted with something that is exceedingly valuable in Christ.

There are many who reject Christ. There was a time when I also rejected Christ. There was a time when I ridiculed and despised the church. So, we all start from the same level. We all start as sinners, as enemies of God, as people who reject God. And then there comes a time when eventually, in God's grace, we receive, we accept his kingship. But we all start at the same level. Nobody starts with any great advantage over the other. We all start with the same.

When does the difference arise then? Well, as time goes on, you will find that a gap widens out. Although every Christian starts at the same place, they do not finish at the same place. Now that is the beauty of this parable! They all start with one pound, but what happens? After a time, one of them has developed his one pound into ten pounds! Another person has developed it into five pounds! And another person has done absolutely nothing with it!

Is that not something we all see in the church? I see so many Christians. Some of you have come to the Lord in this church. I have seen you right from the beginning and I have seen how you have grown spiritually. I have seen that your one pound became two pounds, became three pounds, has now become four pounds! But from time to time, I have also seen others, unfortunately, who just got stuck. Nothing happened! Their one pound just remained one pound. Two years later, it is still one pound. Three years later, it is still one pound. By the time they are old and gray, it is still one pound! In the church, how long you have been a Christian is not a criterion of how mature you are spiritually; it proves absolutely nothing. You can be a Christian all your life and be spiritually absolutely nothing. Or you may be, on the other hand, a Christian only for 2 or 3 years and have become spiritually so advanced.

We All Start with the Same, so What Makes the Difference?

Now the next question here is: What makes the difference? Why is it that one person becomes a 'ten-pounder', that is, his one pound becomes ten pounds? He manages a 1000% increase! By business standards, that really is something. A 1000% increase! The other person has made a 500% increase. But the other person has 0% increase.

Here, then, out of these ten servants, we find three fundamentally different types, and that is true of all Christian life. You will find these three fundamentally different types:

1. The one that goes all out, turning his one pound into ten, with 1000% interest.
2. Another who goes quite far, is quite strong, but always with a certain amount of hesitation. He produces only 500%, but that is still very good.
3. Then there is yet another: The one who has 0% increase.

Of course, there are all the varying ones in between: some produce 800%, some 700%, some 200% and some maybe only 50%. The Lord Jesus, of course, is just giving three fundamental types; he is not giving all the intermediate types in between. Now what we need to consider is: what makes this difference between Christians.

All three are servants. On that point, they are no different. They are all servants of the master. We are all servants of God. In that respect, there is no difference between any of us, between you and me, and between anyone else who is a true Christian in the Biblical sense. Why is it there is somebody who becomes a Sòng Shàng-Jié [宋尚节], a John Sung, a mighty servant of God? Why is it one becomes a D.L. Moody and another person becomes nothing? Here, we need to consider the principles of service.

Difference in Spiritual Initiative and Drive

The first thing: Notice the difference in initiative. Nobody makes any great return on any business who has not got initiative. You do not get 1000% interest by sitting back in your armchair and reading the comics, nothing is produced by doing that. The person who produces that kind of phenomenal results has to have spiritual drive, spiritual dynamic, spiritual initiative. He is not one who is going to sit back and hope for the best.

You cannot do business like that! The Chinese are some of the best business people in the world. They can compete with the Jews anytime. And Jews are great business people. In Shanghai, where I come from, there were lots of Jews at the time. We discovered that there is one place in the world where the Jews have a lot of trouble getting rich, and that is in China, because they are up against their own kind. The Chinese, like the Jew, can go anywhere in the world. He starts a laundry and he gets rich. He starts a restaurant and he gets rich. He goes anywhere – South America, North America, he cannot speak the

language – it does not matter! He does not know a word of the language and he still gets rich.

We have seen this kind of people in England; they used to come to England in the early days. They would survey the situation and they would say, “Yeah! Here, what I can do is . . .”. They would say, “Yeah! I can open a launderette! Start a laundry business!” And so, they would start a business. Now, that takes initiative! The man that I knew lived in England forty-some years. All his children grew up in England. He cannot speak English that I can understand. I cannot understand his Chinese either because he is from Táishān (台山) [a county-level city in southwestern Guangdong, China]. I do not understand how he gets on with the other Chinese because not too many in that area speak Táishān either. [The main language of Táishān is Taishanese. Before the 1980s, Taishanese was the predominant Chinese language spoken throughout North America's Chinatowns.] So, he only speaks Táishān [Taishanese]; that is the only language he can speak. Imagine that! He can run a successful laundry business and put all his children through university! How successful is that? Remember he does not even speak the language. If the Jews can come up against this kind of competition, it is really something. So, I think for us, as Chinese, it is not hard to understand what we mean by ‘drive’ or ‘initiative’.

Now this man did not get his business going by just sitting back in his armchair and moaning, and saying, “Well, I can’t speak the language. I’m far away from home in a foreign country. I really have no education. I can’t compete with the people here. They all have at least several years of education. I can’t even read and write.” He is not going to sit there and mope. He studies the situation. He looks at what he can do. He looks at the market there and he says, “Right! Laundry!” Now he’d never have done any laundry before in his life, but after all, one can learn to wash clothes in a pretty short time. And so, before long, he puts up a little counter somewhere and furnishes it with a sign that says, “Bring in the clothes and I’ll wash them for you.” Before you know it, business has taken off. His business is really going. Today his children are biochemists, engineers, doctors. They are all doing fine. He put them all through university. And they are going on, too. Initiative! Drive!

Now if we understand these things in the material world, how is it we have trouble understanding in the spiritual world? Surely we should not have any trouble understanding the same principle. The servant of God must have spiritual drive, spiritual initiative. He must be the kind of person who is not content with the mediocre. He looks at the situation spiritually. He looks at the situation in the world, a world that is a hostile environment, like this man who came

from Táishān (台山) and lives in Wales. Even to this day he lives in Wales. Well, he is in a foreign environment. Not only that, he is, in a way, in a hostile environment, because he was not accepted as one of the local people, of course. But he was able through his resourcefulness and drive to make a go of it.

In the same way, we live in a hostile environment. The world does not look with approval upon us. We, once we become Christians, are like foreigners in this world. Even our parents sometimes think we are strange, that we are nutty, out of our minds, impractical, foolish, “giving up your good career and your education and your prospects”. For this guy who went overseas, his family must have thought he was out of his mind. They probably said, “You do not even speak the language. You are not practical. You are not realistic. You won’t make it in a foreign land.” In those days, very few Chinese had come overseas to England, for sure. But he had the drive! He went forth! He went. He did it and accomplished what everyone thought could not be done. What about us? Do we have that drive?

But we have to go further back than this. What drives the person? What makes him do this? What is the dynamic, that motivating power? What motivates me? What motivates every true Christian? This comes to the point about Christian service, which is distinct from any other kind of service. Look at these three servants and notice their attitude to their master. They are very different – each one.

The first one, what makes him work so hard? Is it just because he happens to have drive? You see, the difference between our story of this man from Táishān (台山) and these servants is this: This man from Táishān (台山) is making a go of it for himself. It is his own interest he is working for. But a good servant is working for the master, not for himself. So, what would motivate him? What motivates an employee?

Difference in Attitude and Concept of God

Well, here comes the point. When we look at this, we see a very important distinction in attitude between these three servants. This comes out most clearly from the last of these servants. What do we see about the last of these servants? Notice carefully his attitude. He produced nothing. He produced 0% increase. Why? Notice his attitude. He says to the master, “Because I was afraid of you.” He said to the Lord, “*Lord, here is your pound, which I... laid away in a napkin....*” Now, keeping money in a napkin, hidden in a cloth, was quite common

in those days. They did not have safe vaults where you could go down underneath and open the lock and hide it away. So, people kept valuables, either buried in the ground, or in a napkin somewhere amidst other things to keep it safe. *“Lord, here is your pound, which I kept laid away in a napkin....”*

Why did he not produce any results? V21 says, *“I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man;”* – you are a hard man, you are an austere man – *“you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow”*. What does that mean? “Well, I did the sowing and you want to do the reaping. You are the kind of person who takes advantage of me. You are not only a hard man, a feelingless man, but you take advantage of other people. I sow and you want to reap.” Oh! Ah! Why did you become his servant in the first place? That is the question, isn’t it? Why did you accept to be a servant? No one forced him to become a servant. No one forces us to be a Christian. But notice his concept of the master. His concept of the master is of an austere, hard, feelingless man. Now, clearly, the other two servants did not share that view. This brings me to a fundamental point here. Why is it that different people have different concepts about God? Why? God is the same God. Why is it two different people will have two different concepts about God, two different ways of seeing God?

Now, to my mind – to my mind – I cannot understand what this fellow is saying. To me, God is not at all severe and austere, taking advantage of me. Is that why you do not want him to reign over your life – because you think he is severe and harsh, and will take advantage of you? Maybe you think he will take advantage of you, and tell you to do the things that you do not really want to do; he wants to reap where he did not sow – and try to get what he did not put into it. I do not see God like this. My concept of God is such that I do not understand what this servant is talking about. My concept of God is that of one who is exceedingly gracious, exceedingly kind, exceedingly good – so good that it is far beyond anything I could ever deserve. His kindness never ceases to astonish me. So many times, I say to my wife, “How good God is to us! We do not deserve his mercies, and yet, he pours out his kindness upon us. He lavishes his kindness upon us.”

And yet, I do know that there are some people whose concept of God is not like mine at all. There are some people who come and talk to me, and say “Why does God do this to me? Why is God like this? Why is he so hard on me?” So, clearly, their concept of God is very different from the concept of God I have, which is that of abundant kindness. I find this distinction seen also very much in the Bible. The psalmist says: “God is so good!” We sing that hymn, “God is so good!” And yet, not everybody, not even all Christians, share

that view. Why is that so? What is the reason that God is the same God, and yet, different people end up with different notions about God? Throughout the psalms, you will read, “God is good! Let us praise him. Praise him with the harp. Praise him with every musical instrument! God is so kind, so good!”

Why does this servant say exactly the opposite? “God is so hard, feelingless, taking advantage of people, always wanting to dominate our lives and boss us around.” I do not find God bossing my life. I say to the Lord, “Lord, you are King of my life. You run my life. My life is at your disposal to do what you please.” I do not find him kicking me around like a football, or throwing me around like a basketball. I do not find that. I am willing that he should run my life. I would gladly let him. I feel this way, and I say to him, “By all means, use me in any way you please.” But I have never felt that he kicks me around. He treats me with such gentleness and kindness. So, why does this person have such a different concept of God? That is a very important question.

I wonder what your concept of God is. Do you share the psalmist’s concept, like he says in Ps 135:3, “Praise the LORD for he is good! Praise the LORD for he is gracious!”? You see, the psalmist’s concept of God is entirely different from this person’s. Now, one of them has to be wrong and the other one right. Who is right and who is wrong? God cannot be both kind and harsh at the same time, or at once gracious and yet nasty; he cannot be both compassionate and rude. One cannot be both of these things at the same time; that would be a logical contradiction. So how can there be such a difference in our concepts of God?

How God Appears to You Depends upon Your Attitude to Him

As I analyze this matter, and as I look in the Scripture, I see that how God appears to us, how God will appear to you, depends upon your attitude towards God. Fundamentally, it is the person himself who is going to decide what kind of vision of God he gets. You see, the Bible says this: “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*” [Ps 66:18-KJV] Now look at what happens. If you hide sin in your heart, you will find that God does not hear you. And when you find that God does not hear you, what will your feelings be toward him? How are you going to feel about him? “God never answers my prayer.” And if you find that God never answers your prayer, you are going to feel, “Well, God does not care about me.” And if you feel that God does not care about you, you are going to feel, “Well, God has no compassion.” If you feel that God has no compassion, you are going to say, “You see, God is feelingless. He is austere. He is severe. He is hard. He is deaf to my pleas.” Now,

is that your experience of God? If that is your experience of God, remember the principle: If you hide iniquity in your heart, God will not hear you! And then begins the chain reaction.

On the other hand, when you do not hide iniquity in your heart, when you do not hide sin in your heart, when you come with openness, confessing your sins, asking his forgiveness, asking him to cleanse your heart of sin, you find that God responds to you. He answers your prayers. “Oh!” you say, “God is so good! He is so kind to me!”

Of course! But it is the same God. It is you who determines God’s response to you. Some people say, “God is so far away. He is so far I cannot touch him; I cannot feel him at all.” Well, of course not. Why? It is because they stay far away from God. The Bible says in James, “*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.*” [Jam 4:8] Others will say God is so near! It is wonderful. “That’s very funny, I find him very far away.” Well, what is the difference? Is it because God treats people differently? Sure, he treats people differently, not because he wants to treat people differently, but it is because you have determined the way in which he is going to have to treat you.

If you keep sin in your heart – your arrogance, your pride, your selfishness, your greed – you make it impossible for God to answer you. If he answered you in those circumstances, he would be encouraging you in your greed. You would not see any need to change from sinfulness and from greed and from pride. If God were to answer you when you are sinful, you would not see the importance of righteousness and holiness. God has to refuse you in order to make you change your position. Only then will he answer you.

Now that we understand the Biblical principle, we can immediately see why this servant is such an utter failure. He had never yet broken away from his self-centered, sinful way of life! As a result, whenever he prayed, he found that God did not answer him. God did not respond to him. And when God does not respond to him, he says, “Lord, why are you treating me like this?” It is just like these people, as I mentioned earlier, who just want to make use of God: “Lord, help me to pass my exams.” But what right have you to ask anything of God at all? What gives you a right to ask him that he should make you pass your exams? Why? You live in selfishness; you live in sin; and you want God to serve you, to help you to pass your exams, to help you to get a good job, to keep you safe upon the road; when you get sick, that God should make you well. He is going to be your doctor; he is going to be your chauffeur; he is going to be your Protector – he is going to be everything for you! But what do

you ever do for him?

You are perplexed and say, “Oh, am I supposed to do something for him? I thought God was there to be my universal servant, my genie out of the bottle. When you open the bottle, he is there to do whatever you command.” With that concept of Christianity, if God answered your prayer, he would drive you further and further into the spiritual grave that you are already in. He cannot answer you because to answer you would be to encourage your selfishness, your pride, your self-centeredness. This cannot be done. Now that is the reason why some people find God so good and why other people find God never answers their prayer, he is hard, he is without feeling, he is untouched by their problems and their difficulties.

Principle of Service: Absolute Adoration

If God is so good to you, inevitably your heart rises in praise and adoration to God all the time. You feel a sense of worship and praise. God is so good! You cannot help worshipping him. You do not know how! Charles Wesley says, “O for a thousand tongues to sing, my great Redeemer’s praise!” A thousand tongues! My one tongue is not enough to sing his praise. If only I had one thousand tongues to sing his praise! Well, this third servant would not have understood what Wesley is talking about. “Even with my one tongue, I cannot find anything to praise him with. I can’t find anything to say about him with one tongue. With a thousand tongues, I would be even more dumb than I could imagine.” You see, contrasting attitudes: the same God and different attitudes, different concepts of him. The attitude of worship and adoration comes out of love.

Now what motivates our spiritual initiative? What motivates me? What drives me on is precisely this concept of God that I have come, through experience, to possess, to acquire. What drives me on is God’s goodness. It motivates me. Oh, I want everybody to know how good God is! Oh, if only you could know him! His loving-kindness, oh how great! As David said, “Your loving-kindness has enlarged my heart.” It has enlarged my heart, it has expanded my whole being – God’s loving-kindness! This motivates you; it drives you on.

Here, notice the wisdom of the master. This servant here is described as “wicked”. Notice the word “wicked” [v22]; he hid sin in his heart. But he did not serve God because he feared God. When you sin, you are going to be afraid. You feel you dare not come near to God. All of us have sinned. We know what it feels like. We know what it feels like to sin. Certainly, I have sinned. And whenever I sin, I fear God. I want to draw away from him. When Adam and Eve sinned,

what did they do? They went and hid themselves. You want to stay away from God, “God, don’t come near me.” That was the first reaction of Peter when he saw the power and the majesty of Christ. He said to the Lord Jesus, “*Depart from me,*” – that is, go away – “*for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*” [Lk 5:8] You see, sin has the tendency to drive you away from God and it brings fear into the heart. Fear! And fear is not a motive that drives you on in spiritual service. Not in spiritual service! Fear might be a motive in the world, maybe; but in spiritual service, it does not work. You cannot frighten people into serving God. You cannot do that. It frightens them away; it does not frighten them into serving God. It is love, Paul says, “*...the love of Christ constraineth ...*”, motivates me. [2 Cor. 5:14 KJV]

That is why, as we analyze the matter, what makes two people different? One person is a ten-pound Christian and the other is a zero-pound Christian. He ends up with nothing. Remember this last one had even his pound taken away. He ends up with nothing! The difference lies in the spiritual initiative and spiritual drive. But what gives the spiritual initiative? What motivates you? It is the concept of God! If you have an adoring attitude towards God because of his love, that adoration motivates you powerfully into service. But, first, you must come with the right concept of God.

Principle of Service: Complete Commitment

What else can we say on this matter? The other matter, of course, as we have already seen, was his commitment. This wicked servant’s commitment was in question. You see, you cannot serve God without commitment. Commitment means the willingness to accept him practically, actually, factually in your daily life as King. That is what commitment is about. To receive him as Savior is not a commitment. That he does something for you requires no commitment on your part. That you do something for him, that you live under his rule, that is commitment!

This is the fundamental problem with so many Christians. They have a commitment, but it is only a partial commitment. And I have time and time again warned you that a partial commitment will end up in disaster. Now notice this man had a commitment. He was a servant! Like all the other servants, he was one of the servants. He had a commitment. If he had no commitment, he would not have been a servant. He was not drafted in, grabbed in by the scruff of the neck. If you are a Christian today, it is not because anyone grabbed you by the scruff of the neck and forced you at gunpoint to become a Christian. You became a Christian of your own choice. You made that commitment, but the commitment too often is a

partial one. When it comes under pressure and under stress, it breaks! This person's commitment was only partial and the failure became evident.

Principle of Service: Eager Expectation

But we have to conclude on our last point. The last point is the point of expectation. These two servants – the one who brought forth ten pounds and the other who brought forth five pounds – knew that the master was coming back. He said so. He was coming back. They knew therefore there was a certain amount of time that they had to do this work in. It was in view of the happy expectation that the master they love was coming back. In the light of this expectation, they worked, “so when he comes back again, he is going to be pleased”. “Why do I want him to be pleased? It is because I love him so much! I love him so much! He is so wonderful! And when he comes back, I want him to be pleased.”

But notice, of course, one is excited to the extent of making five pounds, while the other's expectation wishes to increase the pleasure and the joy that he is going to give to his master to ten pounds. There again you see the difference of the motivation. So, notice this matter then. The expectation is a driving force as well. I am expecting to see Jesus. He came the first time; he will come the second time. All of us are going to see him at one time or another. But that expectation is not just to know he is coming. That does not produce anything. We are talking about the inner expectation, the joy, the eagerness of seeing him again. I wonder if you share that eagerness. I wonder.

Your child, I am sure, every day when you are going to come home, is eagerly expecting. “Daddy is coming home! I haven't seen him all day.” Looking forward with eager joy, he or she is already drawing a little picture so that when Daddy comes home, he or she can give it to you. My little girl often draws a picture for me. She says, “Look Daddy! I've drawn all these pictures for you.” Why did she do that? She was expecting my return, and therefore, she was hoping to give me the joyful welcome. And so, she drew these nice little pictures for me. I have quite a collection of these pictures already. Your child might even make a little something for you. What for? It is because your child loves you. Your child wants you to be happy when you come back. That is why your child looks forward to your coming with expectation.

The ‘ACE’ Principle of Service

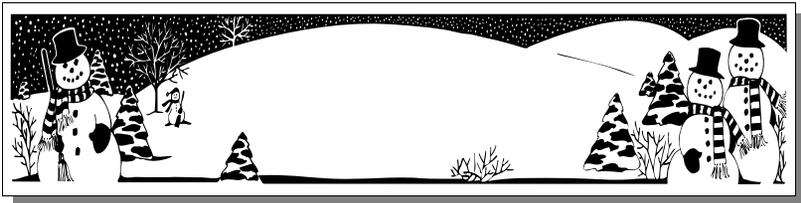
In conclusion, I shall call these three principles of service: “The ACE Principle of Service.” Do you know what the word ‘ace’ means? If you say he is a “flying

ace”, it means he is an outstanding pilot. If he is an ‘ace’ it means he is the best. We are not just trying to produce servants of God. After all, the third one in the parable, the bad one is also a servant of God. We hope to be “ace servants”, the best of servants.

The ACE Principle of Service is: ‘A’ for ‘Adoration’, ‘C’ for ‘Commitment’, ‘E’ for ‘Expectation’. ‘ACE’! You can even make it a double ‘A’, a double ‘C’, and a double ‘E’ simply in this way: ‘Abundant Adoration’, ‘Complete Commitment’ and ‘Eager Expectation’. That makes it ‘ACE’. Beautiful!

If you can implement this ACE Principle of Service, then you will be the servant with the ten pounds. Whether you achieve five or ten pounds depends on how well you implement these three principles. I hope that each one of us will become outstanding servants of God in this generation: that this adoring attitude will motivate us; that we will check our commitment, whether it is a complete, a total commitment to God or just a partial one, in which the other part is that we make use of God; and that we make sure our expectation of God is an eager expectation. That is the way to become a “Spiritual ACE”! 

*End of message
This is an edited transcription of the message.
The editors accept full responsibility for arrangement
and addition of Bible references.
All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version,
unless otherwise specified.*



EXPLANATION OF COVER

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

LuKe 19:13 NASV



from the Editor's Desk



To our dear readers:

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ!

God gave His greatest gift to us
on that first Christmas Day
and may the wonder of it
always guide you and light your way...

Have a Wonderful Christmas
and
a Blessed New Year 2017!

From the Oasis Team



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