

Concordia Theological Monthly



OCTOBER

1951

Sermon Study on Luke 19:11-27

(The first in the 1951-52 series on "The Priesthood of Believers")

FOR THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

A glance at the table of "Movable Feasts and Festivals" in the *Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 158, will reveal how seldom there are twenty-seven Sundays after Trinity making the Propers for the Twenty-Sixth available in the Common Service. November is Stewardship Month in many a Protestant parish, and doubtless many a pastor utilizes the Gospel for this day much more frequently than the liturgical schedule suggests. Nevertheless 1951 provides a unique opportunity to employ the text in the setting of teaching in which our Lord gave it. For it stands in that notable series of lessons on the Last Things with which the Christian church year closes and with which it turns the hearts of the believers toward their Lord in a most direct way. Thus viewed, the text becomes much more than the opportunity to gather the annual pledges for church contributions. It becomes a definition of the state of mind with which the Christian lives his entire life. The church year is not designed to lead the worshiper through a variety of religious experiences, but rather to refresh in him, periodically, attitudes of faith which he is to possess always. That fact applies to the great lesson of this text, "*Invest Your Capital!*"

In another form this parable confronts us in Matt. 25:14-30. There it is told in connection with the end of all things and the return of Christ to Judgment, and it counsels to faithfulness and alertness in expectation of that coming. According to Luke 19:11, that is exactly the function of the parable at this place also, with the special emphasis of pointing out, moreover, that there is still a time of waiting and probation ahead of the disciples and the Church before the Kingdom is consummated, i. e., before Judgment Day. Does Luke 19:27 relate this parable to others on the rejection of Israel, such as Matt. 22:1-4; 25:1-13; Luke 20:9-18?

A study of the parable indeed reveals that it is much more than instruction on the proper use of earthly endowments and that it concerns the basic intention of God toward men before He removes them into a life beyond the earth which is their lasting destiny. That intention is that He Himself should be Lord in them and that they over whom He rules should be busy at the task of extending that lordship and rule over others.

This is one of the parables of the Kingdom. Although one of the most abundant concepts in the Synoptic Gospels, it is one of the most widely misunderstood. Some expositors have made out of it a future rule and situation into which the Messiah sought to take His followers. This concept has again diverged into several patterns. In Jesus' own time many people, among them His own disciples, hoped that He would establish a Jewish government which would eject the Romans and re-establish the earthly throne of David. Its modern counterpart is that view which assumes that the Kingdom of God is the rule of peace and comfort among men. Against such a view of the Kingdom this parable is directed; cf. v. 11. The other pattern of interpretation concerning the Kingdom of God is that it refers exclusively to a life and world after Judgment Day, "the Kingdom of Glory," unto which our Lord will take all who believe in Him. Then John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world" is interpreted to mean, "My kingdom does not exist in this world, but in the world to come." Then the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer is interpreted to mean, "Let Judgment Day come speedily."

This parable is most useful in correcting misunderstandings about the Kingdom and in providing the insight into its true nature. The Savior utilizes a situation in politics with which the people of His time were familiar, that of a noble going into another land in order to take over its government. "Kingdom" is therefore not simply a space concept, a number of people who are governed, or a territory which is ruled; but the kingdom is the rule itself, the authority, the direction and regime. In v. 12 we have the picture of a man taking over rulership. In v. 14 (cf. also v. 27) we have the picture of people rejecting the rulership which is already formally exercised. In vv. 17, 19 we have the picture of people, under the authority of their ruler and accepting it and demon-

strating their allegiance, being made a part of the exercise of the authority of the ruler. The servants who received authority over cities did not become kings of these cities, but they did have the business of bringing the king's authority to bear upon these cities. Thus the Kingdom which the Savior describes is one which is already being exerted over certain people. It is an authority which is to be extended over others. It is an authority which the members of the Kingdom helped to exercise over others. Someday that authority will become complete.

EXEGETICAL NOTES

V. 11: The setting of the story is Christ's last journey up to Jerusalem. The idea of a material kingdom is apparent in the disciples also in v. 37 and parallels, Luke 22:24-30 and parallels; cf. also Luke 24:21.

V. 12: Commentators point out that Archelaus had gone to Rome to obtain confirmation of the will of Herod the Great, while a Jewish delegation opposed his claim (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II, p. 466).

V. 13: This parable differs from Matt. 25:14 ff. in that the "pound" is a relatively tiny sum, twenty-five to fifty dollars, compared with the talent, which was a huge sum. In the Matthew parable each servant received a different sum. In this parable each receives the same. Even though the "pound" is relatively small, it is to be used to best advantage, the holder is to produce a yield with it. The accent is not on the size of the capital, but on the demand that it should be put to work. The purpose of the nobleman's act is apparent from the rest of the parable. The manner in which the capital is employed reveals the fitness of the individual for tasks of authority in the kingdom.

V. 14: Some people were already outwardly under the authority of the king, but they repudiated it. In its setting this remark defines the nature of those who opposed the work of Jesus Christ, and establishes them as enemies; note also v. 27. The true relation of the member to the kingdom is one of the heart and will. However, the king is engaged in a process of extending and establishing his rule, of making it be not merely an outward, but an inward one.

V. 15: At this point the difficulties in the interpretation of any parable commence. Is our Lord speaking of the act of laying claim upon His kingdom which occurs when He goes to the Cross to redeem the world? This seems plausible on the basis of John 14:1-4. Is His return, then, the final return to Judgment? That is also plausible (so Georg Stoeckhardt, *Biblische Geschichte des Neuen Testaments*, p.233). Then the application of the parable to the present life of Christians centers in the stewardship of the capital assigned to them. Whatever use is made of the parable, the accent must be placed on the lesson that the Savior is trying to teach. That is that the consummation of His kingdom is not immediately at hand, v. 11. Activity intervenes before that time — activity in which each disciple and follower has much to do. It should be noted that the parable stands in the general sequence with the Savior's teachings on the Last Things. But in keeping with all of that teaching, His accent is on the life *now*. Simultaneously He bids His followers think of the Kingdom coming, and of its having already come to them.

V. 16: The accent is not merely on "ten," but also on "thy." The servant had been operating with a charge and trust. Hence his work was a mark of his allegiance to his king, of the king's lordship over him. It is noteworthy that the servant could succeed in trade despite the hostility of the enemies of the king. The parable in Matthew 25 does not work with this point.

V. 17: Now the ruler reveals the purpose of the test. He has a task and authority to commit to the servant, and this test has had as its purpose the demonstration of fitness for it. The Matthew parable does not define rulership and adds also the phrase: "Enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Vv. 18-19: A distinction is made between the success in trade and the subsequent authority. The parable does not suggest that the distinction was due to varying degrees of faithfulness. As the parable stands, it might suggest that there were differing degrees of competence in trade. Again a careful exegesis will be reluctant to press the parable beyond its central intentions.

V. 20: The third servant kept his coin wrapped up; he made no effort to get a yield from his capital. The service to which the

ruler commissions as a token of loyalty is one that produces gain. Hence lip service is not loyalty at all, cf. James 1:27; 2:17.

V. 21: The sluggish servant's reaction toward his master is expressed in the same terms as Matt. 25:24.

V. 22: The master is not impressed with the reasoning of the servant. He reproves it as a statement of disloyalty. He does not deny the designation of "austere," and he acknowledges that he employs his servants to carry out his own ends and objectives.

V. 23: He points out that if the servant had been serious about that appraisal, he would have made at least a beginning in achieving a yield with his capital. "My coming" has an almost technical sound and is a strong hint of the return of Jesus to Judgment.

Vv. 24-26: The judgment of the ruler upon the slothful servant on the surface sounds cruel. The Savior draws attention to it with the words of v. 25. (This seems to be the most likely significance; Manuscript D omits the verse. Others imagine that the verse marks an interpolation of the listeners directing their inquiry to Jesus.) The Savior points out that to be busy with His tasks in itself produces a yield and a growth in service and responsibility, but to be lifeless at His task means to be deprived of every part in His kingdom.

V. 27: Most spectacular is the judgment upon those who protested the authority of the ruler. They are straightway killed. In terms of the Savior's own kingdom, this implies an outward and public judgment upon a condition which already existed in the heart. Their inner allegiance was already dead; their outer life now is also cut off. Commentators seek to bring into the orbit of this verse some of the earthly judgments upon the enemies of Christ. This is obviously difficult if the interpretation of the final coming of the Kingdom is to be that of the Lord's return.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARABLE

We have already indicated some of the applications of the parable. It is important to scrutinize and exploit the central bearing of the parable and not to be unduly distracted by individual items. What is the service that is implied by the putting out of capital to gain? Evidently it is related in the Savior's mind with

the concept of His kingdom. His kingdom is that He Himself takes control of the human heart and draws men into His service. That He gives men a capital which they are to use implies that He imparts this power to them to the end that they should produce gain. But this gain is also in Kingdom terms. Its gain is to be like the capital which produced it. Men with Christ's life and Spirit in them are to live so in this present time before the Lord's second coming that this life and presence of Christ, this sway and lordship of Christ, be extended and multiplied.

The stewardship, therefore, to which this text stimulates is the stewardship of the highest gift, of the gift of God's Spirit Himself. The passage most completely parallel to this text is 1 Peter 4:10-11, which also urges a stewardship of the Spirit of God, 1 Peter 4:6, in view of the fact that the faithfulness of Christians will be tried prior to His coming again to Judgment (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:4). It is the Kingdom itself over which the members of Christ's Church are herewith asked to be stewards. The Kingdom has already come to them, as the Small Catechism has it: "When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity." This kingdom within them is, however, to be a treasure which is to produce gain: the Kingdom transferred to and active in other people. Where the Christian is faithful at that task—the task of the royal priesthood, the task of Christian witness—there results will accrue. For witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the preaching of repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus will produce its results (cf. Luke 24:46-48). To faithfulness in that task our Lord directs in this parable.

The kingdom is not primarily a public spectacle or the establishment of earthly power. The spectacle of Christ's taking over at the Last Judgment with power is one to be deferred to His Day. Already before that time, however, His kingdom is active. When Christ says that it is not of this world (John 18:36), He does not mean that it has to wait for the life to come, but He means that it is a power and a government which does not operate with human might, but with His truth, with the force of His redemptive work on the Cross and the story of that work preached throughout the world.

Fascinating it is to speculate as to the nature of this "authority" that the Lord will give to His servants in the life to come, the "rule over cities." He spoke about it again in the Upper Room (Luke 22:28-30). When the Lord speaks of it, He does not hold out political or Sybaritic enjoyments of power. Again He is speaking of the Kingdom, of the manner in which His life and presence is going to be effective in people even after the grave. The writer of Revelation speaks of the elders that are close to the throne of heaven (cf. 19:4 and many parallels). Christ's rule in His kingdom is not one of penalty and might, but of His imparting of the life and power of God to men. Hence when His people share in that Kingdom and its functions, in this life or in the life to come, they are sharing in the provision of the life of God in Christ unto men. That is another way of saying that when we talk about the priesthood of believers, we are speaking of a task which never ends, which here is carried out in difficulty and there in glory.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PREACHING

Theme: "Invest Your Capital!"

- I. Christ leaves us in this world with a capital to invest.
 - A. While we are to think of all of our endowments and abilities as a gift of God to be used wisely, this text bids us concentrate upon His highest gift, namely, that of His kingdom and Spirit. Cf. 1 Peter 4:10-11.
 - B. We invest this capital well when
 1. We make the Spirit the driving force of all that we do, witness to His power in all of our speech and life, make clear that Christ is Lord in all of our actions and speech.
 2. We succeed in bringing the power of the Spirit into the lives of others, that they, too, believe and are saved and serve Christ.
- II. Christ will return to judge our investment.
 - A. The Kingdom in which we already stand will at His Judgment be consummated and completed. Toward that we strive, for that we yearn.

- B. Then the results of our stewardship will be manifested, the purpose of our witness be made clear.
 - C. Our use of Christ's life and Spirit will go on in the life to come, and with it the opportunity to serve others. Cf. 1 Cor. 13:8, 13.
 - D. Meantime let us be about our Lord's business and properly invest the gift which we already have, putting the Spirit of God and His power behind the use of all of our speech, service, giving, living.
- III. Christ enables us to be good stewards of our capital
- A. It is Christ who gives us the capital to invest. The Spirit of God and the Kingdom of God are His gift. Cf. John 3:1 ff. He died and rose again that we might have His life and live under Him in His kingdom.
 - B. It is Christ through whom our presence in the Kingdom and our use of His gift is strengthened and preserved. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:57-58; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 1 Peter 5:10; Rev. 7:11-17.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Alfred von Rohr Sauer is professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.

Frederick E. Mayer is professor of Dogmatics at the same seminary and managing editor of this journal.

Richard R. Caemmerer is professor of Homiletics at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. and is in charge of this journal's Homiletic Section.

The Rev. Paul G. Bretscher is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church of New Orleans, La.

The contributors to *Theological Observer* and the book reviewers are members of the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo.