

Sermon for Sunday, November 10, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

St. Luke 19:11-26

Text: "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."
St. Luke 19:26

When Jesus tells the parable of the pounds the Bible tells us he is near Jerusalem. His ministry is fast coming to a close. This means the parable should have special significance. In the parable he tells the disciples of a man who is going away to be appointed king. We know he is talking about himself and we remember the words of St. Paul, "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." But in the parable Jesus tells us that not only is the man going away to be appointed king, but that he will then return. Again there is little doubt that Jesus is talking about himself and we remember the words of the angels to his disciples, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

And who are the servants of the parable to whom the man leaves the care of his goods while he is gone? It is you - it is I! While we are waiting for the return of our King we are to be busy about his work. We are to take what he has entrusted to us and use it for him. He says to us, "trade with this while I am away."

Why do you suppose he said that? Is it because when we are at work for someone, when we are doing the things he wants us to do, then we think about him? Isn't this true in your life? When you don't come to church for a while, when you are not doing anything for the cause of Jesus, when you are not consciously trying to live for Him, is it not true that you begin to forget about Jesus? And when you do not pray every day, when you do not read your Bible regularly, do you not forget Jesus? Yes, if Jesus is to be really real to us we must be about his business, we must be doing his work. Jesus says to us, "trade with this while I am away." Only as I do that can I remember him; only as I do that can I continue to remind myself that he is coming again.

There are two kinds of servants in the parable Jesus told. First are the two men who were faithful. One man returned 10 pounds for that which had been entrusted to him and the second man returned 5. Do you think they were expecting a reward? Surely not. They were servants. They and all they were belonged to their master. All of the fruits of their labor belonged to him. And isn't this true of good people - Christian people? When they serve Jesus they are not thinking of bargains or rewards or a bonus. They are simply serving their Lord out of a deep love and commitment.

But do you know its a funny thing about serving Jesus that way. Those deeds done without thought of reward, those acts done without any motive except love for Jesus have, after all, been rewarding. We discover by such selfless love and service that we have a new form of happiness, a new form of being rewarded, for that service brought us close to Jesus and those whom he loves. It brings a satisfaction and contentment, a sense of identity and closeness with Jesus as we do his work that no mere reward could ever bring. You try serving Jesus out of sheer love for him and see if it doesn't work that way for you.

The second kind of servant in the parable of Jesus was the man who took what his Lord gave him, wrapped it in a handkerchief and simply held on to it. "Here is your pound," he says to his returned Master, "I kept it put away. 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." There is something almost pathetic and sad about this man. One feels almost as though he is mistreated in the end. After all, did he not faithfully go around with his pound carefully wrapped in his handkerchief?

I want to make two observations about this man that will help us to understand why, in spite of his careful hoarding of his pound, he is condemned. The first observation is this: he looked at his master critically. "He wants to reap where he did not sow. He is a hard man who draws out what he never put in." In other words, the master expected too much return for what He had given the servant.

Is the parallel in life obvious? God gives me my faith - little as it is - and He expects me to produce for His kingdom. Yet, when I look at life, God expects far too much for what he has given me. How can you explain poverty and hunger...how can you explain war and hatred...how can you explain killing and pain and death...how can you understand a loved one snatched away in sudden illness...how can you understand dreams that never come true...how can you understand life that never seems to measure up to expectations? How can God expect the little smidgen, the tiny dab of faith He has given me to produce much in my life when I'm not even sure anybody up there cares about me? How can I keep on working for God when He doesn't give me much reason to have faith?

So his master expected too much in return for what he left with the servant. But notice the second observation: In spite of his attitude, in spite of his little reasons to produce for his master, the man keeps what he has received. He doesn't throw it away. He doesn't spend it. No, he keeps it. He preserves it. And when he does that he recognizes the rights of his Lord. Here again the parallel to life is obvious. We don't do anything much with our little smidgen of faith, we don't produce an abundant harvest of good works for Jesus, but we don't throw our faith away either. We don't add to what we receive, but we keep what we have. We preserve it. We wrap our little dab of faith up in an occasional church attendance, a small yearly gift to the church. And if our church asks us to support it adequately it isn't because we don't have it to give, it is because we think Jesus demands too much for what he has given us.

So first the man looked at his master critically and found him wanting and secondly, he kept the pound and thereby recognized the rights of his master to it. Now listen carefully. The master says to him, "I will judge you by your own words. I am going to meet you on your own level. I'm going to take what you said and measure you against it. You said you were afraid of me - you said you took me seriously." And, after all, don't we always take seriously those things we are afraid of? "But," says the master, "if you took me seriously, if I am the sort of person you say I am, you have not fought against me. Some of your fellow citizens hated me and sent a delegation after me asking that I not be made king over them. You didn't do that. You didn't fight against me and if I'm the sort of person you say - a hard man, drawing where I never put in, sowing where I never reaped - then if you took me seriously you would have opposed me, fought me. If you felt about me the way you did and took me seriously, you would have thrown your pound away. You would have cast it from you. You would have cried out, "I want nothing to do with this man who draws and sows where he has no right." You would have said, "I will have nothing to do with this master who gives so little and expects so much." But you didn't do that. You sat on the fence. You wouldn't trade with what I gave you, but you wouldn't throw it away either. You played both ends against the middle and were dishonest to both.

Does that make sense to you? There are only two ways to take a thing seriously. Either you renounce and deny it and cast it from you or else you risk everything you have and are for it. Either you throw your pound away in disgust and anger, or you trade with it. There is no third choice of wrapping it in your handkerchief and keeping it.

I say to you this morning, either throw your faith and your Christianity on the trash heap or else commit the whole of your life to Jesus without reservation. I say to you, if God gives you no reason for faithful service, if you feel God to be uncaring and unjust then chunk the whole thing. Shake your fist at God and have done with him. That, or give him your life wholly and completely and without reservation. There really is no third choice.

See how it works. Suppose I make a commitment to Jesus' church that I will give so much money to his work. Either that commitment ought to represent at least a tithe of my income or I am not taking God seriously. Either I pay my pledge to His church or else I ought to cancel it and get out of the church altogether. Either I take God seriously and oppose him or surrender to him because in reality there is no such thing as a nominal Christian.

I want to make a challenge to you this morning. Jesus said some words and I want you to put him to the test. I want you to meet God on his own level. Take his words and let God stand or fall on his own words. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish..." I want you to put God to the test. Jesus says, "He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." I challenge you to put God to the test. God says, "Cast your cares on me and I will care for you." I challenge you to put God to the test. Jesus says, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest unto your souls." I challenge you to put God to the test. Let him stand or fall on his own words. I challenge you to take God seriously today either to commit yourselves completely and wholly and totally to him or to chunk the whole thing. There is no third choice. Jesus said, "he who comes to me I will in no wise cast out." That is his promise to you. Put him to the test That's his word and he died for it and he deserves to be given a chance in your life.

I was reading a story not long ago about a woman who was wealthy, elderly, and had a lot of money. A piano salesman was trying to sell her a baby grand piano. She told the salesman she didn't have much use for a baby grand piano. He said to her, "But lady as much money as you've got your'e going to die before too long and what's it going to matter. You can't take it with you. She said, "Young man I'll come a lot closer taking that money than I will taking that baby grand piano."

I want to tell you, you can take it with you. You can take it with you. When the hills have been worn level with the plains, when the mountains have been worn away, a cup of water given in the name of Jesus will still endure. I don't know what your'e going to do with all of your money next year. Your'e going to buy food and then it will be gone. You may buy a new home and it will grow old and one day collapse. You may buy a new car and it will grow old and wear out. Your'e going to buy some clothes and they will get raggedy. Most of the things that you are planning on spending your money for will not endure. But, I want to promise you that what you spend on Jesus Christ and his church next year, when the hills are gone and the mountains are worn away you will have that treasure in heaven. That's the only money you can take with you is what you spend on Jesus. Now I don't know what you are going to do about your pledge. Aren't things going up? My grocery bill staggers me. But my church is first with me because I take God

seriously. I have been praying about what I am going to do. I am going to raise my pledge \$600 over last year because I take God seriously. What are you going to do? Are you going to take him seriously? I know it costs more to live but I know you also probably have more. Let's take God seriously and put him to the test.

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