

Where in the World Are We?

Luke 19:11-27

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ June 30, 2019 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

¹¹ As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹² So he said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. ¹³ He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, ‘Do business with these until I come back.’ ¹⁴ But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to rule over us.’ ¹⁵ When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading. ¹⁶ The first came forward and said, ‘Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds.’ ¹⁷ He said to him, ‘Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of ten cities.’ ¹⁸ Then the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your pound has made five pounds.’ ¹⁹ He said to him, ‘And you, rule over five cities.’ ²⁰ Then the other came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, ²¹ for I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man; you take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.’ ²² He said to him, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then did you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with interest.’ ²⁴ He said to the bystanders, ‘Take the pound from him and give it to the one who has ten pounds.’ ²⁵ (And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten pounds!’) ²⁶ ‘I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken

away. ²⁷ But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.”

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I would love for you to keep your Scripture open today as we walk through this together. Some key phrases will be good to look at as we go.

They say, “Timing is everything,” whoever *they* is. When you search for an author to that quote, you won’t easily find one. But, here at Faith, we just finished a week of Vacation Bible School where the theme was ancient Athens. So here’s a quote from the Greek poet Hesiod that comes close:

“Observe due measure, for right timing is in all things the most important factor.”

I will be first to admit, having the right timing has not always been my strongest suit. It took me 20 years of ministry to finally decide to seek ordination. When I go stargazing with people, I always seem to be looking in the wrong part of the sky. When I was in high school, I wanted to ask this girl named Wendy McCaffree to the Junior Prom. I pulled my courage together and asked her...at about 10 o’clock the night before. She turned me down and said that wouldn’t be enough time to get ready. I mean, how much time do you need? In hindsight, I have no regrets in how that story turned out. But, still...*timing is everything.*

You could say Jesus’ timing wasn’t very good. Can you imagine if he came a couple thousand years later and had an Instagram account and a Youtube channel? He could have saved himself a lot of walking through the dessert with a crew of very ordinary women and men. But we can’t argue with a timing that confirmed all of the prophecies

spoken for thousands of years before, still recorded for us today in our Scripture.

As we continue to walk through the story of the life of Christ in the Book of Luke, it is so important to pay attention to the timing. Luke is so intentional about the timing of the stories, and gives some great clues for when we should be paying attention to the timing.

Last week, Rick brought to us a message of Zacchaeus, and the transformation that happened at his house when Jesus broke all of the rules and went to eat at his house.

“Today, salvation has come to this house!” Today! Now, usually when the Jews talked about salvation it would have been connected to the ways God literally “saved” the Israelites in the past: fleeing from Egypt, crossing the desert, facing their enemies. Or, they use the word salvation to describe their hope in what God promises to do in the future, to redeem all of Israel, their promised land, to bring God’s rightful reign and protection back. And this was in a time, frankly, when they were losing hope.

But the actual *name* of Jesus, which is a form of Joshua, or Yah – shuah, meaning Yahweh (or God) is salvation. So, when Jesus says, “Salvation has come to this house,” he was literally saying that *the Only One who can save* has come to this house, and is in fact in the world now, and it is he, it is Jesus. Those that were paying the closest attention, perhaps among those crowding the doorway or leaning in the windows as Rick put it last week, might have caught on to how bold Jesus was being. This would put Jesus on thin ice that would eventually crack and lead to his execution.

“Today Salvation has come to this house.” And while those words came last week, listen to the way our passage starts this morning:

As they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable.

There is a very good chance, even likely, that Jesus is still at Zacchaeus’ house when he goes on to tell this story. And, he gives two very specific reasons for telling this parable that also both have to do with timing:

1. He went on to the parable *because he was near Jerusalem.*
2. *And because they (the crowd leaning in the windows and surrounding the house) supposed that the Kingdom of God was to appear...when?...immediately.*

Jesus was surrounded by these Jewish people who understood that the Kingdom was supposed to be coming. And this crowd that was welcoming him into Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, were in a bit of a frenzy and excitement, and many of them will drop what they are doing and follow Jesus and walk the 20-30 miles so they can see Jesus walk into Jerusalem and be part of the triumphant celebration.

To say that this crowd was *expectant* would be the understatement of the year. The Kingdom of God was going to come. Everything would change. But this parable of the servants entrusted with their masters money, if we really listen through these expectant lenses, would dampen the mood just a little bit.

The Kingdom of God? Yes, it’s close. In fact, Salvation has come, it’s right here in this house! Reach out and touch it!

But the Kingdom of God? It’s complicated. It’s near, in fact, it’s right among you, too, wrapped in this salvation. But this is ALSO something that is going to have to be worked out. You will be entrusted with this salvation, and you’ll be expected to do something with it. Soon, I’m going away from you like this Master, and when I return, whenever that will be, I can’t wait to see what you’ve done with this amazing gift called salvation that comes to you by pure grace. Don’t bury it! Use it!

Preach this Gospel!
Share your bread!
Release the captives among you!
Take care of your orphans, widows, and those without homes!
Walk alongside the mentally ill!
Pay attention to the ways God is among you and leading you!

You know, I want to interject here for a moment, and say a more personal word about timing. Luke says, “while they were listening to this...” At every

turn, Jesus weaves together teaching with real life that was happening. People are broken like Zacchaeus, he meets them in whatever tree they are in, and brings God's Word.

I have struggled this week about what God could possibly be saying through this passage to a church family that has experienced so much loss in just a couple of weeks. We have widows and orphans among us, people grieving and without the safety of what they know as "home". And while I have experienced God's presence in conversations with many people recently, my struggle is what God wants to say through this passage this morning.

As they were listening to this, he went to tell a parable.

I found myself asking, "God? If you are listening to all we have experienced the past couple of weeks, do you still want to go on to tell this parable?"

The answer I came away with is *absolutely*. This is exactly where God wants us to land this morning. And here's why. Jesus was surrounded by people that were expecting God to show up *immediately*, but they would be the same ones that in only a few days would be disillusioned and disoriented by the results. Jesus would be tried and convicted without hardly a word from him, and eventually crucified. Jesus had got their hopes up, led them on, then left them hung out to dry. God would exit the building, so to speak.

So Jesus told them a parable about a master that calls his servants together, entrusts them with everything he has. The important thing at first is not what they will do with the money, but that the master is leaving. He wasn't just going next door, not even to an adjacent country where he could be found. He was going to a distant country. Unreachable. His phone will be on airplane mode. Don't even try. There would be an absence in the household that only the master can fill when he returns.

When we find ourselves in times like this... *in times like this (clap, clap)*... a VBS song I will not start, but is no less true. At the times we need God most are the times when it seems he has gone to a distant country, unreachable.

You can't prepare for moments like these. But here's what we can do together. We can look down at this box in our hands. Open the box and take a look at what God has entrusted us with. It's called "SALVATION".

And Jesus says (which Paul echoes) – work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Or you might say, work out your salvation **EVEN WHEN** you are in fear and trembling.

Jesus promised his disciples he would be back, and we are **STILL** in that waiting period with the box in our hands.

Jesus also promised he would be with them always, till the end of the age.

And here's the expectation that he does not water down in the least. He expects us to take the box, the gift, and do business with it.

In our parable, two of them put the money to good use and they are able to give it back with along with all of the profit. But the third servant, took his box that was entrusted, and in *fear and trembling* hid what was given. He was scared to lose it, and he was afraid because he couldn't feel the master's presence. Perhaps he wasn't even sure if the master would really come back.

And listen to his excuse. He took his cue from Adam and Eve who blamed God for their sin. He blames the master because he knew him to be harsh and unkind and takes what doesn't belong to him. To which the master said, "If that's what you really think about the kind of man I am, therein lies your problem. And now you won't be surprised if I take away what little you have because you didn't think much of it anyway."

"C'mon! You could have at least gained some interest with it!"

Now, here's the contrast. Here's the reason Jesus was telling this after the transformation with Zacchaeus. Zach had just turned over everything to Jesus and promised to pay everyone back. Not that Jesus asked him to do that. He experienced grace and had to respond. It was a demonstration of wild abandon, probably filled with a laughter—an "I can't believe I'm doing this, but it feels so good" kind of laughter.

And now he's telling a story where the master is having to downgrade this enthusiastic response to a very safe and predictable interest-making kind of response.

Jesus said, "A thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy." That thief might also be called "Caution" or "Security" or "Protectiveness". Jesus goes on to say, "I have come that you might have life."

Does he stop there? That we might have life, so some good things, gain a little interest along the way? No. Let me read that whole part, all together:

A thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. But I have come, that you might have life, and have it...abundantly.

Jesus is offering the kind of life in which we constantly are on the look-out for gifts every day that he entrusts us with, and to get out into the world around us and use them, **EVEN IF** it feels that God has left this building, **ESPECIALLY IF** it feels that God has left this building.

To simply try to gain a little interest is to check off the boxes of the Christian life, do some good things, say your prayers. But Jesus is very clear that he doesn't just want obedience without any heart. He wants you and I to offer all that we are and watch what he can do.

At Vacation Bible School this week, kids were taught how to have "God-Sightings". I had to be taught, too. I didn't know that on these sheets of paper you could write the ways that it seemed like someone did something God was helping them to do. On our mission trip next week we'll have opportunities to do a similar thing: point out the places we saw Christ at work among us.

But I was amazed at the simplicity, but power, of their responses. They were spotting ways that God could be seen in the small places. Here are a couple of them:

1. People singing about Jesus / people sharing lunch / We thanked Paul for the lesson / I woke up my sister (well...?)
2. Taught his sister how to do piano / He gave his brother a clock / He told his friend the wifi password (Hmm...)

3. Saw people being joyful / Having the opportunity to be an oikos leader (say more about this...young people knowing they have this treasure God has given them and wanting to use it!) / When people said "Thank You"

Too often, we miss the small chances to see a gift of God as an opportunity, and we bury it by ignoring it or squandering it.

I have this \$10 bill in the back of my phone. I found it laying on the ground at a gas station. But no cars were around for me to ask if anyone lost it. I've been looking for an opportunity to use it. But I've been overthinking it to the point that I haven't used it all in 3 weeks. I want to do something with it that says, "Thank you God not only for this \$10 but for all of the money, time, and energy it represents that I so easily squander or ignore."

We all have a default setting that Jesus is calling us to stand up to a little bit. What's your default setting? When you get unexpected money, what do you naturally do with it that might be missing an opportunity? When you get an extra 20 minutes you didn't think you'd have, what do you fall back on: Social media? A certain video game? Sleep? Actually, a nap may be how you need to fill it. But ask God and make sure. When things are going well, how do you celebrate? Alone or sharing it with others? There are all kinds of things God gives us...how do we invest them?

We have to practice spotting God.

We have to practice hoping and sharing that God IS coming back.

Friends, especially at a time like this in our church when we need each other's investment. Some of us will have a really difficult time believing that God isn't gone for good at a time like this. Invest in each other and remind each other that **GOD IS SALVATION**. And not only is he coming back. He's here even now, in the shadow of darkness **AND** on the mountaintop.

Not only is God away and coming back. So is our Senior Pastor!

I'm not equating Jeff with God. But when he does come back in August, how great would it be if he

were to look around and say, wow, in some really difficult times, this congregation cared for each other well, and it's overflowing into the world in some unexpected places and abundant ways.

Amen.

Let's pray together...

I'd like to ask you to grab a hand if you can reach the one in your aisles together. I think we are in a time when we need to pray for and with each other often and grab each other's hands.

Let's pray...

God we come to you as your people. Help us to reach out for one another, and to begin with the assumption that there is brokenness you can heal, to offer our silent prayers in each meeting, and to let our words create space and grace for that healing to happen.

We lift up to you every person here that is experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one. Those among us are growing, but I pray new friendships would begin through the taking care of one another.

We pray for our African sisters and brothers as we continue this summer Sabbath, both those we know and have yet to meet. We pray for the Chapmans now as they weigh in the balance the great joy of meeting friends and family in Ethiopia with a very difficult political climate that keeps them guessing a bit out of need for their safety. Protect them.

And God, giver of so much to us. Let us invest in places in our community and world that will let a little light into some dark and previously unknown places. Give us courage to not simply give a little here and there for our own sake, but for those of us that are ready, let us echo this prayer together as we go from this place:

Lord, I give you my life. I give you my life and not just a part. I give you my life and not just a part that your love may be seen and that our joy may be complete through the sacrifice—a sacrifice which is only a shadow of the great sacrifice you have made for our salvation.

Thank you, Jesus. We give you the glory. Amen.

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1. Read Luke 19:11-27 again. Listen for what you have not noticed before.
2. In verse 11, what was it about "approaching Jerusalem" that prompted the need for Jesus to tell this parable?
3. The parable includes three different time periods: the sending, in which they are given resources; the accounting, in which they share the results; and the time in between, when they are supposed to be working hard to invest those resources. Which of these phases do feel you are in right now? What has God given you to work with?
4. What is Jesus trying to teach with the fact that each servant was given a different amount of money to invest?
5. In the last servant's speech, how does he excuse the hiding of the gift that God gave him? What is he saying about God? About himself?
6. What is Jesus teaching here about the reason the master deals so harshly with this last servant?
7. How does the desire to protect and play it safe get in the way of living fully for Jesus and the Kingdom he is building?
8. Can you think of one or two ways that God might be calling you (or our church community) to risk and respond more fully to His call?

Table to Table Question
A question for kids and adults
to answer together

Can you think of times God wants us to be careful?
Can you think of times God wants us to take risks?