

Stories from the Road #12

Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem^a

¹¹ As they^b heard these things^c, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹² He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas,^d and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'

¹⁴ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

¹⁵ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business.

¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.'

¹⁷ 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.'

¹⁸ And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.'

¹⁹ And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

²⁰ Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹ for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.'

²² He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴ And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.'

²⁵ And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!'

²⁶ 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'

²⁷ But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'" (Luke 19:11-27)^e

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from the passage?

Q. Which character in these stories do you most identify with?

Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?

^a Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person. "I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:4). In other words, he wants to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus.

^b "They" most likely refers to the crowd of people who have been following Jesus along the road. Some in the crowd would have been committed followers – others would have been undecided.

^c This refers to the conversation Jesus has just finished with Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector. Zacchaeus is a social outcast whom Jesus accepts. Zacchaeus out of thankfulness decides to be generous with his wealth.

^d A mina was about three months' wages for a labourer.

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This is the final story Jesus tells while he is 'on the road', heading towards Jerusalem where he knows he will be executed.

Jesus is aware that the crowds are expecting God's kingdom to come once he arrives at Jerusalem. With the parable Jesus is showing that this is a mistaken expectation – time will pass before this happens. The implied question is "What should Jesus' followers do while they wait?" – which again the parable addresses.

Looking at the detail of the parable, the master in the story is going away to a faraway land to be declared king^f. Time will pass. While he is gone he entrusts wealth^g to his servants so that they can keep serving him faithfully while he is away.

First, noticing the master's generosity. He gave his servants the resources they would need to go about his business and when he came back, the rewards he gives far outweigh the wealth they had accumulated. Even the one who earned 10 minas (about 2.5 years wages) didn't earn anything like the value of even one city.

Secondly, the key difference between the servants who are rewarded and the servant who is punished is whether or not they did what their master tasked them with. On view here is their faithfulness. The implied question here is: Will Jesus followers be trustworthy while they wait for their master to return? Will they live like Jesus instructed or will they bury what he has taught them and ignore his instructions?

Finally, there is one more group who are addressed in the story. Some of the citizens of the master's new kingdom hated him and rejected his rule. The end result was that the king had them slaughtered. This sounds brutal - and it is. However, note the key details. The kingdom was rightfully his and these citizens have taken steps to show they would not recognise him as king. In rejecting the king's rule they have committed treason. It is not a negotiation. The battle line was drawn, and it could only end one way.

This last story that Jesus tells is shocking. It paints a picture of the consequences of ignoring his instructions. Yet it is also encouraging to see the image of the overwhelming generosity that is shown to servants who prove their faithfulness by trusting Jesus and living as he taught them.

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from what you have just read?

Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?

Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?

^f This was a practice of the time - for example, at the time, puppet kings throughout the Roman Empire needed to journey to Rome to be recognized as king of their own land.

^g About three month's worth of wages