

Built Together – Why?

Over the last few years, we have looked together at many different aspects of our life as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the basis of it all is our own individual relationship with God, our own personal rescue from a life lived ‘having no hope and without God in the world’, a life of failure and disobedience.

It is all too easy to think that that may be all that the Good News of Jesus is about – rescue from the power of sin and failure and coming into a real working relationship with the living God. In one sense, that is true, but we have been exploring together more of what that working relationship leads into: – how it affects our lives in so many different ways, how we can begin to be changed from the inside as the Holy Spirit works in us, how we can take hold of what our Father has given us in Christ, and even how we can begin to know God himself – an awesome prospect!

But what is it all for? Why does God bother with all this deep, personal and sometime painfully detailed work with us? Has he got a strong overriding motive? Yes, we know the answer! It is his own amazing love for every member of the human race: *“For God loved the world in this way, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)*

But again we need to ask the question: **WHY?** What is his purpose in loving us like that? We have been beginning to look at the answer to that question. He does not want just a collection of individuals in right relationship with him. That is a vital foundation, but he wants more than that; he wants those individuals to bond together ‘as precious stones that Jesus owns’ and be built into a spiritual ‘house’ where the presence of God dwells. We’re not talking about a building of bricks and mortar. I think we know that.

For that building to take place, it is vital that each one of us has the necessary personal foundations in place. Not that any of us will be perfect in this life, but that we are learning to live where our Father has placed us – in his Son. If you want to see growth in the Church, please do not give in to the temptation to ‘fudge’ this. I have been around long enough and seen enough attempted (but failed) growth to know that it doesn’t work without the foundations.¹

We have looked together at different aspects of those foundations, especially as they relate to our own **individual** lives, and inevitably we have been drawn towards **the purposes of God** as he works in our lives. ‘Why does he bother with me?’ ‘What is this all about?’ ‘Where is it all going?’

As far as I can see, the answer to those questions can be summed up in two words: **Church** and **Kingdom**. In the last couple of times together, we have begun to look more at the Church and seen 1) how we are ‘called out’ and designed to be a dwelling place for God and 2) the need for right foundations and proper building methods and materials.

¹ **1 Corinthians 3:10-17**. Also *The Christ-Life for the Self-Life* by F B Meyer and *By His Doing*. Both from www.justonecandle.uk

But again the question, **why?** Is the Church God's ultimate purpose? Or does he have an even greater agenda? Can we possibly be part of it? I believe that the answer to that question has been before us in plain sight, but – somehow – we have usually missed it! And here in **Luke 19**, Jesus gives us a beautifully simple insight into it!

In this chapter, we see Jesus meeting with a nasty little rich man whose life was transformed – Zacchaeus! We may have known the story for years: Jesus calls him down from a tree and then goes to his house for a meal and probably to stay the night. But we may have missed the 'after-dinner parable' which he told there, maybe because it is very like the 'parable of the talents' which we find in **Matthew 25**. But this one (**Luke 19:11-27**) is different in a number of ways. Jesus told it in Jericho, when he was still on his way to Jerusalem. He told 'the talents' in Jerusalem. I'll leave you to do the full comparison yourself . . .

Yes, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, and there was an ever-growing sense of expectation. Later in this same chapter, we read of him riding into the city, surrounded by his jubilant crowd of disciples. They were definitely expecting something exciting to happen, calling him 'King' and quoting from the Psalms. They seemed certain what was happening: *"they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately"* (v.11). Several weeks later, when the Kingdom of God had NOT arrived as soon as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the question came back into their minds: *"Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* (**Acts 1:6**). The question was 'When?' It was never 'Where?'

For years, we may have accepted the common idea that 'the disciples had got it all wrong; Jesus wasn't going to set up his Kingdom on the earth'. Yes, they **had** got it wrong, but not in that way. He didn't tell them that the Kingdom would not be on earth, just that it was not going to happen immediately.

'No,' says Jesus, 'it's not yet, and I'll tell you a parable to illustrate it' – and gave us all the parable of the minas.¹ From our familiarity with the parable of the talents, we may think that the lesson here is exactly the same, to make the best use of the abilities that we have. (Even the word 'talent', which was originally the word for an enormous sum of money, has passed into English with a completely different meaning!)

But there is a very clear direction here. We're not often told **why** Jesus told each parable (I can't think of another example), but Luke tells us here *"because he was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."* (v.11) I am impressed: Luke wasn't there, so he must have found this out in his research into Jesus' life and ministry. Whoever told him about this episode remembered **why Jesus told the parable!**

It's not difficult to work out who the characters in this story represent. There is a nobleman who is about to go to a distant country to be awarded kingship of a realm which includes where he is currently based, and his citizens (the local residents) reject him and definitely do not want him to be their king. He leaves ten of his slaves

¹ A mina was a lot of money (about 100 days' wages), but nothing like as much as a talent (about 15 years' wages!)

to carry on his business while he is away and gives them some cash to do business¹ with until he comes back. He receives the kingdom, comes back to his 'home base' after some time and checks up on the slaves to see how they have got on. The ones who have done well are not just congratulated, they become governors of cities in the kingdom which the nobleman has received. Remember, these are not paid servants; they are slaves who are **owned** by their master. They suddenly become local rulers under their boss, who has now become king!

At the time that Jesus told this parable, he was only a few days away from his death and resurrection, and had just another six weeks with the disciples before he 'went to a distant country', taken up into the clouds before their eyes. He told them to wait in the city for 'the promise of my Father' which would come upon them and they would be "*clothed with power from on high*" (**Luke 24:45-53 & Acts 1:4-11**). And then there was the promise that he would come back "*in just the same way as you have watched him go into the sky*", given by the 'two men in white clothing' and confirming what he had already taught about his **future** return and the coming of the 'kingdom of the heavens'.²

The 'nobleman' in the parable is Jesus, having received his kingdom and due to return to his household in his 'home base' (this world) to see how his slaves (his disciples, the Church, we his followers) have got on with his 'business' during his absence. The nobleman's citizens who did not want him to rule over them are those who reject him – the majority of Jews at that time and all who have rejected his rule ever since.

Can you see the simple parallels in this story? This is a parable about the coming of the Kingdom of God – and our involvement with it! I like Matthew's phrase 'the kingdom of the heavens' – God ruling on the earth, just as he does in all the rest of creation!³

So, his return will be a time of reckoning for those in his 'household' – how faithful will we have been with what he has committed to us? How much will we have learned to equip us to be useful in his coming kingdom? Will he be able to entrust us with further responsibilities? Perhaps we can begin to see how important and relevant it is for us to develop as individual believers, and also to learn how to function together in his 'household', preparing for his return and the manifestation of his Kingdom on this earth.

I am not going to try to guess at what 'the kingdom of the heavens' will be like when "*the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ*",⁴ nor what sort of responsibilities he may give us, but this parable gives us a big clue: Becoming the governor of several cities is VERY different from handling your boss's business: the 'training' we have **now** is different from our future responsibilities!

¹ I like the Greek work here '*pragmateuomai*' – same origins as our word 'pragmatic'. They needed to **do something** with the cash!

² See **Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13, Luke 21:5-36**.

³ See [Revolution on Earth](http://www.justonecandle.uk), a series of simple studies on the Kingdom of God, from www.justonecandle.uk

⁴ **Revelation 11:15**

This also follows up some very clear prophecies in **Daniel 7**, which refer to “*one like a Son of Man*” who will come “*with the clouds of heaven*” and be “*given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him*” (**v.13-14**). And there is more that relates directly to us! **Daniel 7:18** says “*But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for all ages to come*” and **v.27** says “*Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; his kingdom an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him.*” Wow!

Just a small but significant point. In case we might be tempted to think that this is some sort of picture of ‘heaven’, the prophecy very clearly states that this will take place ‘**under the whole heaven**’. This really is the coming kingdom of God on this earth, which Jesus taught so much about, and which underlies so much of what was written by John, Paul and Peter. Perhaps one of the most eloquent passages is **Romans 8:18-25**, which we have looked at before. But it is good to be reminded, so please do read it again!

This all may seem very different from what we have become used to. Hopefully we have left behind any ideas of simply ‘going to church and trying to live a good life’ and have found real new life through personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and what he did for us – once and for all – through his death, burial, resurrection and return to ‘the right hand of the Father’. If that is not yet your experience, please do not wait to actively take hold of the new life which can be yours today – and for eternity!¹

But, if we **have** taken hold of that new life, have we seen that all our vital and ongoing spiritual development – both individually and together in fellowship – is also preparation for our long-term future in the coming kingdom of God, just as the nobleman’s slaves were being trained for their future roles in his kingdom? They would not have even guessed at the possibility, but it was coming, none the less. Their boss knew what he was doing!

Of course, the work which the slaves did while their boss was away was not **only** training and preparation for the future kingdom. It had value there and then, for his business to prosper in the meanwhile, and it is the same for us. How we live and **learn** to live **now** is certainly not irrelevant. We want to see our boss’s ‘business’ flourish here and now – life in the fellowship of the Church, the ‘body of Christ’. What we know (and the slaves didn’t) is that it is also a vital part of our preparation for the full manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

We **are** being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Perhaps now we can see a little more clearly WHY. Next, we need to start to look into a little of the ‘HOW’ . . .

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¹ You may find the little booklet ‘Reborn’ helpful: <https://www.justonecandle.uk/PDFs/Reborn.pdf>