

## I. Introduction

A. What is success? And, according to that definition, are you successful? Has your definition of success changed over time? Should it? Is your definition of success and God's the same? Are you sure? These are big questions. We take them up today as we return to Luke.

B. By my count this is the 68<sup>th</sup> message in this series and we have 21 to go. Hang in there.

C. We are in chapter 19, Jesus is approaching Jerusalem for the big week – which will end with his crucifixion and resurrection. Everything since page three has been pointing to what is about to happen.

D. And we are slightly out of order today because next week Anson will be doing a special sermon on Zacchaeus.

E. In today's passage just before this Jesus has interacted with Zacchaeus, a rich and very unpopular tax collector and traitor and physically small man who had climbed a tree to try to get a glimpse of Jesus only to have Jesus come to his house.

1. After spending time with Jesus, Zacchaeus pledges to help the poor, Jesus says, "Today salvation has come into this house."

2. This causes the disciples and crowd to go on high alert, thinking, if good things are happening to this slime ball that can only mean that everything is coming to a zenith. The day we have been waiting for is about to happen. At the Passover Jesus is going to restore Israel.

F. It is right after that that Jesus tells them another parable because of the way they are thinking.

## II. Luke 19:11: **While they were listening to this (all the commotion around Zacchaeus) he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.**

A. At some point someone will predict the return of Christ and be right. History is marching towards a culmination – in which Jesus will be exalted. He will return and set up his eternal kingdom. History is not circular. And it will not go on forever.

B. But what we see here – and what we see throughout two thousand years of church history – is that there has always been groups convinced that they were living in the last days.

1. In the first century there were people in Thessalonica who stopped working because they were certain Christ would be back soon. Paul was forced to say, "If you do not work you do not eat."
2. When Rome fell in 410 many were sure that the end was near.
3. Augustine set the date at 1000 AD and for a long time to believe anything else was considered heresy.
4. In the Middle Ages a Benedictine Monk named Joaichin divided all of history into three periods of generations each. OT, NT and HS. He then set the date at 1260.
5. During the Black Plaque that claimed the lives of almost a third of Europe during the Middle Ages many announced that the end was at hand.
6. During the Reformation the radical reformer Melchior Hofmann believed, from a study on Daniel 12, that there were the last days. He believed that Muslim Turks were the BI Gog and Magog. He predicted that around 1553 that he would be imprisoned and then that X would return. He was half right.
7. Martin Luther thought the end was very near, though wisely said it was unwise to set an exact date b/c Christians "no more know the exact time of X's return than little babies in their mother's bodies know about their arrival."<sup>1</sup> He didn't believe there was enough time to worry about sending out missionaries.
8. At the beginning of the 19th century many Americans thought that the rise of events in Europe - the French Revolution, Napoleon and the outbreak of warfare in Europe heralded the end of the age.
9. Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest mind this country has ever known, said: "God in his providence now seems to be acting over again the same part which he did a little time before Christ came."<sup>1</sup>
10. William Miller (1782 – 1849) was the most famous American to predict a date. He studied the book of Daniel for two years and then concluded that X would return on March 21, 1843. Thousands of followers believed this, but nothing happened. He readjusted his date to Oct. 22, 1844. When this date passed it was labeled The Great Disappointment

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<sup>1</sup> Very good article in CT, Nov. 9 1990, pg 35 that talks about how these men could do it and the writer, Mark Galli, concludes that it has to do with their being in love with X. Like a love sick teenager who simply can't wait to see his girlfriend or boyfriend and jump every time the phone rings and knock the mailman over with the screen door to see if they got a letter, Luther and Edwards loved X so much that they simply wanted to see Him come soon.

a) Some – such as Hellen G. White, who founded the Seventh Day Adventists – decided to reinterpret that date spiritually and say that he did come, just not literally.

b) The Jehovah's Witnesses – who also look to Miller – kept on predicting dates.

(1) 1874: Nothing happened so they said X returned invisibly

(2) 1914: This did coincide with the start of WWI and therefore was an exciting time for them

(3) 1918: They added 3 ½ years. Then added another 3 ½ years

(4) 1975: This was a big year; many left the movement after this

11. Christians in this century have thought that Christ would return many times.

a) Some believed that Hitler was the anti X

b) Planets were all going to align in 1984. This got a fair bit of press. And despite the fact that: 1) Those making these claims were not scientists; 2) The planets line up like this every 179 years; 3) this wasn't even a good alignment

c) Recently there have been others making guesses. Twenty years ago someone announced that the vultures in the Middle East had started laying 4x as many eggs as they previously had, stating that this was a clear sign that God was supplying scavengers to clean up after Armageddon. Never mind that there is no mention of this in the Bible or that this was probably just part of the ecological balance of the area or that there is little evidence to suggest that it ever even happened.

12. In 1988 I was sent a book entitled, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could be in 1988*

a) Edgar Whisenant, a retired NASA engineer turned self taught Bible scholar, distributed 4,000,000 copies of the book.

b) History is littered with people who have set dates and been wrong.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Every attempt that has been made to fix a date even approximately has brought the truth into discredit, especially in view of the fact that many predictions have been made, and changed with

c) A year later – I kid you not – he sent out his revised version on why the rapture would occur in 1989.<sup>2</sup>

13. When I first started in ministry as a college pastor, the work was principally funded by a man who had not gone to college because he had been persuaded that there wasn't time. He had always regretted that.

C. This parable makes a couple key points.

1. One of them is, do not let your hope or belief that things are nearing the end slow you down from doing the right thing. Some have thought that the end is so near that there isn't time to help the poor or challenge unjust systems or there isn't need to save or whatever.

a) Please remember, it is very hard to understand how this will play out. When we dig into what Jesus says about the coming of his Kingdom we come away with these three paradoxes:<sup>3</sup>

(1) It's here but still in the future

(2) It's near and its far off

(3) We will not know the time but here are the signs

2. Take Kingdom Risks

**III. Luke 19: While they were listening to this (all the commotion around Zacchaeus) he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.**

A. Jesus is clearly talking about himself. He has about two weeks to live. After his death and resurrection He will spend 40 days among them before ascending to heaven, where he is now. And at some point He will return.

B. So, Jesus is talking about himself. Although, this would also remind his listeners of what had happened twice recently in their country.

1. In 40 BC Herod the Great had traveled to Rome to be appointed King of the Jews.

2. In 4 BC – about thirty years earlier – Herod's son had made a similar trip expecting to be named King, but the people sent a delegation to say to Caesar "we do not want this man over us."

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startling adroitness, in order that the date might still further be postponed in view of previous mistakes. (G. Cambell Morgan)

3. And as a result, Herod had divided the Kingdom into pieces and only given him part of it. And that had made Herod – called Herod the Tetrarch and Herod Archeous (Herod the Great had named all of his kids Herod, even his daughters, so it's very hard to tell them apart). But this Herod had gotten very mad and, upon his return to Jerusalem he had had everyone who had lined up against him – and everyone related to them, 3,000 in all – killed.

C. You may be confused about your current political options. You may be wondering who to back. It could be worse.

1. The parable Jesus is telling reminds them that their parents had to figure out who to back and, if they got it wrong, were killed.

D. That is all very important context for what Jesus says next.

IV. So, you have a guy leaving on a trip in which he expects to be made king. V13 **So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.' But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'**

A. This parable is told in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew's account the word used is Talent – which gives us our English word.

B. Luke uses *minas* – which is less money. Think about 3 months' wages.

1. You hear all kinds of numbers associated with it, but that is because people make different amounts of money.

2. It is not insignificant. It would be quite a gift for a servant, who likely never has much money ahead of time.

C. The NIV translates this, "**Put this money to work UNTIL I come back.**" I prefer those versions that translate *en ho* as "because I am coming back."

D. It doesn't change everything – the big takeaway is still around stewardship. But it does spike the drama a bit.

1. In his discussion of this, Ken Bailey, the American scholar who lived and served as a missionary in the Middle East for forty years studying and teaching the parables, learning how they were understood in a Middle Eastern context, and who just passed away this week.

2. In his book, he said, imagine you are living in Iran in the 70s. And the Shah is about to be deposed. And he is leaving the country to go secure his future, but before he goes he gives out money and says, "Invest this because I am coming back." That would mean something different than, "Invest this until I come back."

3. You would think differently if you thought “I need to advertise my allegiance here.”

E. Bailey persuaded me that this is a better translation of *en ho*. There is more going on here than I realized before. But it doesn’t ultimately change the bigger point about what it looks like to be a success.

F. Reading on:

V. V15 **“He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. “The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’**

A. You gave me X and I used it to make 10X. Capitalism at its finest.

VI. 17 **“Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ “The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ “His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’**

VII. V20: **“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ “His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’**

A. Think about what Jesus is saying here. To us. To you.

B. About half of the parables celebrate God’s grace. They promote love and mercy. They talk about forgiveness and caring for those who are broken.

C. And the other half sound like stories you’d read in *Inc.* or *Fast Company* or *Fortune* magazine. Capitalism 101. Get out there and make it happen. Get a return on investment. Only they are not celebrations of capitalism per se but usually more of social capitalism.

D. Some do not like this kind of talk. It doesn’t sound godly per your understanding of godly. It’s too aggressive. I would encourage you to listen to what God is saying here. There is an expectation of a return on investment.

**VIII. V24: “Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ “‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’ “He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away.**

IX. And then he adds – V27, **“But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.”**

X. Let me make five observations that tie back to the question of success.

A. One: We are stewards.

1. Baked into everything we find in the Bible is the idea that we are not owners. Everything everywhere belongs to God. He made it and retains all rights. Everything on the asset side of our balance sheets is on loan.

2. I will repeat again the famous line by Abraham Kuyper, a remarkable Dutch theologian, who lived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. And who edited the national newspaper, founded the Free University of Amsterdam, founded a political party, served as Prime Minister – pretty much did everything, which begs the question, what you done lately. Anyway, one of his lines is that, “There is not one square inch of the universe about which Jesus Christ does not say, ‘ Mine.’”

3. God created everything. We are money managers. It’s not our money. We are expected to invest his funds according to his values and plan.

B. Two: We are not equal.

1. We all have unbelievable value in God’s eyes. We all have great worth because we have been made in God’s image. You are his.

2. At one level there is ontological equality. But in a different way, we are not all equal. We are not all the same. Some people are smarter than others. Some are stronger. Some are faster. The account in Matthew is slightly different. Three people instead of ten and they are given different numbers of talents at the front end.

3. And there the reward is the same for the one who turned 5 into 10 and the one who turned two into four. They enter into the joy of the master.

4. I think it’s obvious that there are some ten talent people out there and there are five talent people out there.

5. Many in this room have been given a lot. I know that many of you have worked hard with what you have been given and made more. That is one of the things I like about Christ Church.
  6. But success for you and me might look very different.
  7. I'll go back to my baseball analogy. Some of us were born on third base and act like we hit a triple.
- C. Three: God works this out in the end
1. The reward for the guy who went from 10 to 20 and the reward for the person who went from 5 to 10 is that they both get to enter the kingdom.
  2. It would be God's prerogative to do whatever He likes, but the suggestion is that God's expectations are adjusted to the person. Those to whom much is given, much is expected.
- D. Four: Everyone has been given something
1. If a Minas is \$15K or \$1M, we all have enough to go make something happen.
  2. Everyone has opportunities to be faithful.
- E. Five: We will be held accountable.
1. There is a final audit. We will be judged based on what we do with what we've been given.
    - a) This is not referencing salvation. Salvation, eternity, heaven – this is a gift based on what Jesus has done. But heaven is not a communist state where everyone is equal.
    - b) It's not entirely clear how this all gets worked out. There will not be jealousy. It's all good. But Jesus is clear, there is an audit and somehow the results of that audit carry forward.
  2. There are people who waste their life – their gifts and abilities, their opportunities and treasures:
    - a) By being selfish or lazy
    - b) Or by not taking risks. Sometimes sin is doing nothing at all – which is what the third man in the parable did.

XI. This past week I ran across some notes I jotted down two years ago when I was in rehab at RIC.

A. I picked up right away that it would be a really bad day for everyone if I fell.

1. Bad for me.

2. But also bad for whoever was in charge of me at the time.

B. So, I was always in a wheel chair and generally had a seat belt on and early on if I showed any signs of trying to act too aggressively I got scolded by all of the 25 year old, 90 pound aids named Tiffany and Amber who would say, "Mr. Woodruff. Do not

C. At some point I accepted this situation. And I stopped anything that looked risky. I wouldn't try to walk three feet without someone putting the safety belt on me.

D. And then one Saturday I got a different Physical Therapist. I don't remember his name, but he was late 20s and he set up this obstacle course.

E. And I was sitting in a wheel chair and he looked at me and said, "OK. Let's see you do this."

F. And I was waiting for him to come over and stand me up and hold on to me while I walked around these pylons. But he didn't come over. And he said, "OK."

G.

H. It was an important day for me. I appreciated all the concern for my safety. But at some point you have to take some risks.

XII. The challenge here is clear: don't waste your life playing it safe. If you stay in your comfort zone you lose. Don't bury your talent

A. Leverage what you have been given.

B. Don't just sit there, do something

C. Start with serving

D. Start with giving – give one percent

E. Let's be clear, we do not get to decide how God wants his assets managed. He has told us what kind of returns he is looking for

1. Faith

2. Trust

3. Graciousness

#### 4. Serving and giving

XIII. Run risks, take chances and live dangerously for the kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Yet in Jan. 1532 Luther said, "The last day is at hand. My calendar has run out. I know nothing more in my Scriptures."

<sup>2</sup> He said that he had failed to consider that the Gregorian calendars count only 99 years for the first century because they start w/one instead of zero.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, IVP, p. 398.