

A Penny Wise And A Pound Foolish

Luke 19:11-27

Our English language is a language of idioms — probably more so than any other language — and they change almost daily it seems. Just try and keep up with your kids vocabulary these days. What's bad is good, what's in is out and what's hot is actually pretty cool!

An idiom is a speech form or expression that is peculiar to itself grammatically or that cannot be clearly understood from the individual meaning of its words. Here's some examples just for fun using familiar body forms: he yelled at the top of his lungs; there's bad blood between them, he did it behind her back; blood is thicker than water; my blood ran cold; I'll have to break my neck to get it done; I had butterflies in my stomach and they were breathing down my neck. There are literally thousands of them, so many in fact, that foreigners tell us that because of our idioms, they consider English as one of the most difficult languages to learn and speak correctly.

I've chosen to use an old idiom as the title of my sermon today to help describe one of our Lord's parables from the gospel. I've entitled it "A Penny Wise And A Pound Foolish" from Luke 19:11-27. A penny is a small amount of money and a pound is a larger amount. To be penny wise and pound foolish is to be cautious with small amounts of money but foolish with larger amounts. It aptly describes the characters in the parable. Maybe we'll see ourselves.

¹¹While they were listening to this, 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.

Jesus had just completed an interesting dialogue with a tax collector named Zaccheus, who was described as being so short that he had to climb up into a tree to see Jesus as he passed through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem. Our Lord's parting comment to him was one of the most memorable of our Lord's sayings, "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk. 19:10). Jesus was now a day's journey from Jerusalem, two days from his triumphal entry

into the holy city and just seven days from his crucifixion.

¹²He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'"

Now remember that a parable is a story — an illustration. Jesus used natural elements in the form of parables to teach spiritual truths. Parables are figurative expressions, so the characters, although perhaps typical in the real life of that day and time, stood for someone or something else. As you can quickly see, Jesus is talking about himself as "the appointed king" who would someday return. His ten servants were those left behind to do the work of the ministry until he returns — his "then" disciples, and his "now" disciples and every follower in between.

The soon to be king gave each one of his servants a "mina" before he left. The KJV uses the English expression "pound" which represents a sum of money. The mina or pound in that day was the equivalent of three months wages and he expected them to do something productive with it that would bring about a return on his investment. What do you think the mina or pound represents in this parable? I believe that Jesus is talking about spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7).

¹⁴"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

The subjects in the parable are the nation of Israel and all others who reject Christ. Don't confuse them with his servants who chose to follow him.

¹⁵"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."

In John 14, Jesus told his disciples that he was going away to prepare a place for us and he would come back

someday to take us to be with him forever (14:1-3). When he comes we will be asked to give an account of what we did with the gifts he gave us while he was gone. This is called the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). Salvation is not in question but we will certainly lose or gain the rewards God desires to give his people. At least one in this parable didn't do very well. How will we do?

16"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' 17"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' 18"The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' 19"His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'"

These servants did well with the gifts that God had given them and were commended for it. Notice that the king said to the first servant that he *"had been trustworthy in a very small matter."* This doesn't mean that what he did was trivial. It means that it didn't take an extraordinary amount of individual effort on the part of the servant to do good with what God had given him. The reason for that is because we have been given the Holy Spirit to do those good works through us (Eph. 2:10). God never requires us to walk alone.

20"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21I 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.'

To this follower, serving God was a burden. He had an opinion of the king that wasn't accurate which made him afraid to risk what he had been given for fear the king would be displeased. He's like the follower that doesn't want to give up anything for the kingdom for fear that he would lose it all. This servant hid his gift out of fear that he wouldn't be accepted or he would be forced out of his comfort zone. I can think of many applications and examples — and so can you. Let us not be one of them. This servant was penny wise and the king was not pleased. The other servants were pound foolish — but they spent their gifts extravagantly for the Lord, they were fools for Christ (1 Cor. 4:10).

22"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? 23Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' 24"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.' 25'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten.'" 26"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.'

There's another idiom in our cultural exchange that says "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." In this case, that was true but it wasn't the fault of the king. God expects a return on his investment in you. The return is lost souls — around here we called them the "unchurched." Everyone of us knows someone on a personal basis, that is not a part of any fellowship of believers. There are many reasons they are the way they are — but the fact that we have contact with them gives us many opportunities to share with them the love of Christ and his word, which God says, will never return void (Isa. 55:11). God has given us a gift to do that. So why would we ever hide it?

Why do the rich get richer? Why do successful people become more successful? Because they take full advantage of everything they receive — and every little bit more makes them even more successful. The timid, on the other hand, walk the talk of victims instead of victors, weaklings instead of warriors. They fearfully put their minas away for that rainy day should they be left without. Investing God's gift in His kingdom pursuits requires faith and love for our Lord but always results in an increase.

27But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them — bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

The parable again turns to national Israel in particular, and to all of God's enemies in general. There is a day of reckoning for those who hate God. Jesus warned his followers in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." We are never God's enemy when we fail — only when we set our will against His and refuse to use productively what he has given us.

What lessons do we learn from this parable of Jesus in Luke? First, we are reminded that Jesus, although now in heaven, will literally return to the earth again, coming as the absolute King of kings and Lord of lords. Philippians tells us that in that day every knee will bow before him (Phil. 2:10). Second, God has given us spiritual gifts to use while he is gone to bring an increase to his kingdom. Third, he will reward those who have been faithful. Fourth, he will punish his enemies. There will be no rebellious, "doing it my way" subjects in his kingdom. And fifth, those who have an increase when he comes will receive abundantly more. But those who have gained nothing with what he has given them can expect him to give us no more when he returns.

What are you doing with your mina — your gift? What we do with what we've been given is still an unfinished story. It's never too late to be pound foolish for God!
Maranatha. 4/7/02