

Luke 19

John Karmelich

What Jesus expects of believers (in this life)!

Chapter 19 continues Jesus' journey to Jerusalem for "the big scene". It includes the Palm Sunday saga as well as a few famous stories "on the way ". I realize most of us know these stories well, so I'm going to focus on what Jesus desires of us. I know it's impossible to focus on anything 24/7 including what is desired by God. These stories summarize what God the Father desires of us before Jesus returns! These stories are for the saved, so there's no "Repent and believe the Gospel"! Jesus is discussing what we're to do after giving our lives to God. Let me explain:

The first story takes place in Jericho. It is 3,000 feet lower in elevation from Jerusalem and 17 miles in a northeast direction. It was an important city then, as it was one of three big "pay taxes here" places in Israel. Speaking of taxes, the chief Jericho tax collector is "center stage", as Jesus spotted him in a tree (he was short and climbed up to see Jesus). Jesus told this man to get down from the tree to meet Him! Jesus also asked to spend the night with him. He was born Jewish but considered a traitor for collecting taxes with Roman soldiers enforcing His rule.

What fascinated me about the story was this man's biblical knowledge despite being a traitor. The short version is he told Jesus, I will pay back whatever I stole (i.e., collected more than required)! I imagine there was a long line of people demanding payback! Bottom line, he confessed to being a sinner, as he worked hard to change his life AFTER his encounter with Jesus. That is a key first step to how Jesus is wanting us to live as believers. Acknowledge our sinful behavior before Him, then we make the effort to be a good witness and change our behavior. I realize our past sins can't be undone and Jesus is aware of that. There is a handful of Old Testament verses on how much we should pay back after stealing for us to be good with God! The amazing thing is the tax collector picked the strictest way to pay the most out of his pocket. Jesus didn't compliment the man's biblical knowledge, nor say you don't have to pay all that back. He did say that man was saved, not because he acknowledged Jesus as God, although it's implied because he accepted Jesus' invitation to see Him. The point for us is He desires that we use our lives as a witness for Him.

So, was the man saved based on his works? Of course not. The issue is being a witness for Jesus. As a second proof of that point, I present the second illustration in this chapter. This made-up story is about a powerful man who traveled elsewhere to receive a kingdom. The Israelites would understand that, as the local leaders had to travel to Rome, to pay homage to Caesar to be the next leader. This applied for the Herod dynasty as well as Pontius Pilate. Jesus' disciples would get that as it was customary at that time. The connection is that it applies to Jesus as He returns to the Father until Jesus returns to earth at some unknown date in the future. The key issue isn't that all that occurs, Jesus' wants us to understand what happens in the meantime (i.e., now!): Let me explain:

In this story, there are three servants of this powerful man. Each was given a significant sum of money to invest while the leader is away. The point is NOT that all Christians are called to go into investment banking and dealings. The money given represents our lives after being saved. It's the second story of how we are to use our lives for Jesus. The fascinating thing to me is the rewards are not equal. One of the men got a 10-time return on investment and was made ruler over 10 cities. The next man made five times what he was given and made a ruler of five cities (under the leadership of the head guy). The 3rd

guy said he hid the money in the ground. Jesus said at the least he should have deposited the money in the bank and earned interest. (My father was a banker, and I showed him that banking was biblical!)

Notice Jesus said the third guy is implied to not lose his salvation but simply lacked rewards since he is not using his life as God desired. What is implied is works do matter! Not in terms of salvation, but in terms of living as God desires. Does that mean I get a reward based on how many people I save? The answer is no, as only God saves people! The issue is not based on how famous or powerful we are. It's about whether we're doing what God wants us to do with our lives. I've always argued the prayer God will always respond to, is one of total surrender of our will to His and asking what He desires of us. It then leads to what God wants us to do next with our lives. It is a reminder that rewards in heaven exist based on our faithfulness to what God has called us to do with our lives. I realize some people don't get saved till the end, and I realize some saved suffer horribly. That's why God alone decides what will be our rewards for living as He desires.

This leads to the next story in the chapter. This is the "Palm Sunday" story seven days before Jesus did rise from the dead. I admit I love the Palm Sunday story because the prophet Daniel predicted it to that exact day. (See my lesson on Daniel Chapter 9, part 2). Consider the fact Jesus regularly told receivers of miracles in effect be quiet, so the crowds won't trample Him to death demanding miracles! Yet, here Jesus arranges to be worshipped. Why? It was Israel's formal opportunity to either accept or reject Him as king. Of course, they collectively rejected Him, but the opportunity had to be given. With that said, let me discuss how this relates to what God desires of us.

First the text goes into a lot of details about the arrangements made for Jesus to ride into town. We get a few comments about borrowing a donkey as God needed it! We get comments about people putting a garment down in Jesus' path and cutting down palm branches (must have been small trees) to be waved as Jesus passed. OK John, we all know the Palm Sunday story. What did Luke give us all these details about it? Besides being a witness for Him in life, Jesus wants us to corporately worship Him. Realize it is not that God has a big ego to desire worship! It is about us being a good witness for Him. Corporate worship as an act gets our focus on God and it gets people to come together to worship Him helps us to think about Him and draw close to Him!

It is also fascinating that when the Jewish religious leaders told Jesus to silence the people claiming He is the Messiah, Jesus said if the people didn't praise Him, inanimate objects would. In other words, that day (The Palm Sunday) was a day ordained for praise. God the Father desired praises to honor the fact Jesus was sent and well, someone had to do the honor. That leads perfectly to the next fact:

After the big Palm Sunday scene, we get Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem. It is a prophesy about the fact Israel was destroyed by the Romans roughly 40 years later. Jesus is saying in effect, because you (The Jewish religious leadership) refused to recognize who He was, the punishment was severe because they refused to believe He was the Messiah. Those who should have recognized who Jesus was means they will suffer for failing to do so. So why were millions killed by the Romans about 40 years after all that took place? I believe God will judge all people fairly, but that judgement shows the consequences that the Israelites suffered for turning on Jesus! Josephus, a 1st Century Jewish historian wrote about some Christians who escaped from Jerusalem then because they knew Jesus' prediction of that event!

Anyway, we're not done with the chapter: The second to last verse condemns merchants who sold stuff to be sacrificed as I like to say, "at Disneyland prices", and profited from visitors who wanted to offer a sacrifice and were forced to buy "sanctioned" animals. Let's just say Jesus threw a righteous tantrum!

The final verse said the religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus, but He was too popular and others did want to hear what He had to say. In summary the lesson is about God called us to be witness for Him, and failing to do so, may not cost us our salvation, but it still can affect our eternal rewards!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.