

The Parable of the Pounds

The Setting of the Parable (Luke 19.11)

Words of salvation (18.42, 19.5, 10) were 'ringing in the ears' of the crowd (v.11). On this background the Lord Jesus spoke the parable of the pounds. One of the purposes of the parable was therefore to draw attention to the **responsibility** of faithful service that is expected from every believer, whether young or old in the faith.

This parable was also spoken 'because he was nigh to Jerusalem' and because 'they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear' (v.11). As the Lord Jesus moved towards Jerusalem, the excitement of many began to increase. It was Passover time and there was approximately two million more people in and around Jerusalem than there would be normally. If the Son of David was going to take the throne, then surely the city of David (Jerusalem) was the place to do it. Many therefore believed that the kingdom of God was about to 'appear' suddenly and visibly. They were **wrong** and needed to be corrected. It is important to remember that the King had been rejected (Matthew 1-12). As such, the glorious, visible manifestation of the kingdom could **not** be established now. Instead, it would be postponed until the Lord Jesus returns in great power and glory in a coming day (Matthew 19.28, 25.31, Revelation 19).

The History of the Parable (Luke 19.12)

The parable is set against a historical story (which occurred 30 years previous) associated with Herod Archelaus whose palace was in Jericho. Archelaus was the son of Herod the Great (Matthew 2.22).

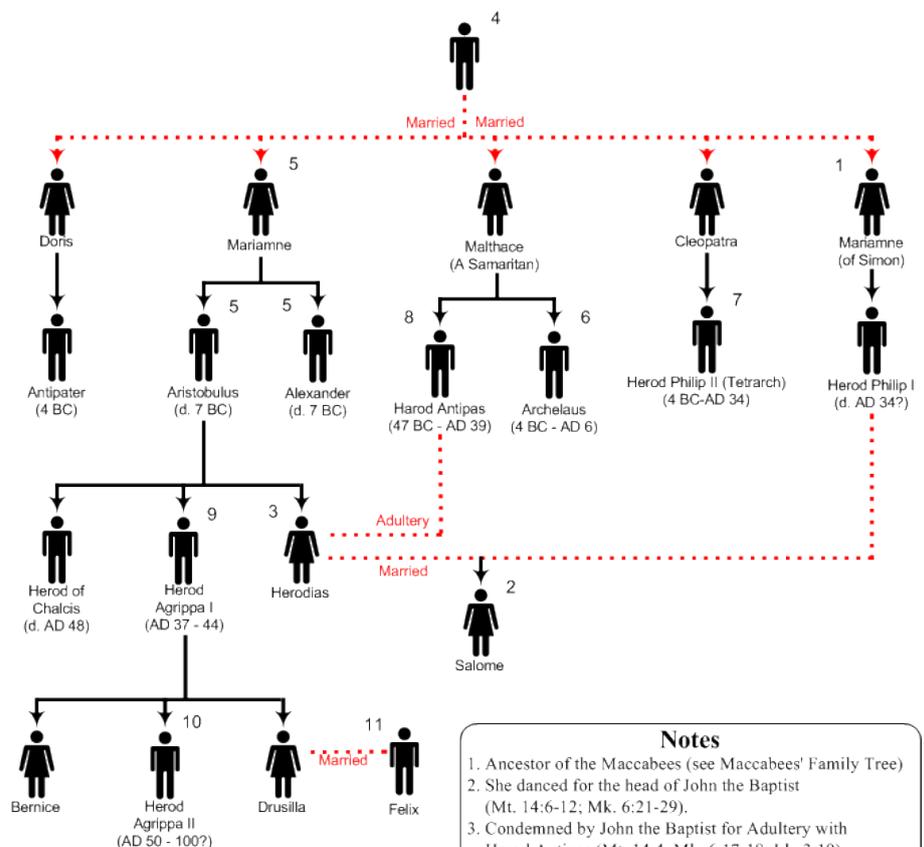
Encyclopaedia Britannica: Named in his father's will as ruler of the largest part of the Judaeian kingdom - Judaea proper, Idumaea, and Samaria - Archelaus went to Rome (4 BC) to defend his title against the claims of his brothers Philip and Antipas before the emperor Augustus. Augustus confirmed him in possession of the largest portion but did not recognize him as king, giving him instead the lesser title of ethnarch (national leader) to emphasise his dependence on Rome.

Archelaus was half Idumaeian and half Samaritan and, like his father, was considered an alien oppressor by his Jewish subjects. Their repeated complaints against him caused Augustus to order him to Rome again in AD 6. After a trial in which he was unsuccessfully defended by the future emperor Tiberius, he was deprived of his throne and exiled to Gaul.

There are further points of interest. When Archelaus travelled to Rome (4 BC), a Jewish deputation was also sent to petition Rome to exclude the Herodians from any involvement in the land's government (v.14). Further, Archelaus is said to have left Philip in charge (in his absence) with money to maintain revenue streams in the tetrarchy (v.13).

The Teaching of the Parable (Luke 19.12-27)

Not only is this parable based on real historical events which would have been familiar to those listening, it is also a picture of the Lord Jesus. He is the 'Nobleman' (v.12). The word literally means 'one well-born' or a 'high-born man'. It speaks of one who has a noble name, birth, home, character, position and wealth. He is the one who went into a 'far



country' (heaven) in order to receive the kingdom (Psalm 2.8, 110.1). This is His own throne which shall be established over the whole world during the millennium (Revelation 3.21, 11.15-18).

Now the **primary** purpose of the parable has been met (correcting the misapprehension concerning the kingdom) the emphasis turns to the **responsibility** of the nobleman's **servants** in his absence (v.13). **Ten** (the number of Godward responsibility) of his own servants are called. These represent both professing and genuine servants of the Lord Jesus. They are given 'ten pounds' in total. A 'pound' was a *mina*, a Greek coin worth 100 drachmas (approximately three months wages for a common labourer, Matthew 20.2). The servants were told to 'occupy' or 'do business' until the nobleman returned (cf. John 21.22, 1 Corinthians 4.5, 11.26, Revelation 2.2). **Trading** was to be their **occupation**.¹

What does the mina represent and how are we to 'trade' with it? It should be noted that each servant received the same amount, one small silver coin. This is something which every servant of Christ is given to use and invest, something which can be removed and transferred to others (vv.24-26). Some say that this represents the redeemed life (silver) that each of us has received at the hand of the Nobleman for which we will be held accountable. Scripture suggests that every believer has been entrusted with at least two sacred deposits. We are stewards of the **grace of God** as revealed in the spiritual gift/s we have been given (1 Peter 4.10) and stewards of the **truth of God's word** (2 Timothy 1.13-14). *1 Corinthians 4.1: Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.* The similar parable of the **talents** (Matthew 25.14-30) answers to the stewardship of **spiritual gifts** (each servant was given a different amount), the parable of the **pounds** answers to the stewardship of **God's word**. What a challenge! We have all been given the sacred deposit of truth. This is the business with which we are to be occupied. It is this that gives us opportunities to serve. How will we use them? Will we be faithful and diligent in His service? This will not be easy! His citizens (Israel) hate Him (v.14, cf. Psalm 69.4, John 19.14-15, Acts 7) but we are to win people from an attitude of antagonism to that of allegiance with Him.

Why should the Nobleman ask his servants to trade? We can rest assured it is not to secure wealth for Himself! Rather... *'He gave them the opportunity of proving their loyalty to him, and by their faithfulness in a little matter to prove their fitness to be entrusted with greater matters, so that he could justly reward them by giving them positions of honour in His kingdom. He loves us and wants us to share His glory. But He is just, too, and the privilege of reigning with Him must be the reward of faithfulness.'* (JH Large)

When the nobleman returns the servants are called to give account of their stewardship (Romans 14.10, 1 Corinthians 3, 2 Corinthians 5.10). Of particular interest to the nobleman is **increase** ('gain', v.15). As we seek to trade with the word of God there should be growth in knowledge and increase in the spiritual lives of ourselves and others (2 Thessalonians 1.3, Hebrews 6.1, 1 Peter 2.1-3, 2 Peter 3.18). The first servant made a 1000% profit (v.16). Note that the servant did not attribute the success to himself, but rather to the pound which belonged to the nobleman. Although we each have responsibility in service, ultimately God must have the glory. The servant receives a commendation (v.17, Matthew 25.21) and 'authority over ten cities'. The reward was directly proportional to the servant's proven faithfulness and industry. The lesson is clear. Faithfulness **here** leads to authority **there**. When the Lord returns, we shall reign with Him and actively participate in the government of that day (Matthew 19.28, 25.31, 1 Corinthians 6.2-3, Revelation 2.26-27, 3.21, 5.10). *It is clear from this parable that the degree of responsibility to be allocated to each believer at the Judgement Seat of Christ will depend on his or her faithful use of the resources committed to his or her trust during the period of the Lord's absence. Those who have served Him well will be granted 'an abundant entrance' into His everlasting kingdom.* There will be greater and grander opportunities to serve Him in that day.

'Another' servant (v.20) of a different kind (wicked) had left the mina wrapped up in a 'napkin'. These were used to wipe perspiration from the face and neck, something clearly not needed by this **lazy** servant. Opportunities had been neglected to be occupied with the word of God. He had misused his time and spent it on himself. The servant tries to blame the nobleman for his own inactivity suggesting that he was 'harsh' and 'stern' (v.21), seeking to 'get something for nothing'. Consequently he was 'fearful' of losing what he had been given. This was an excuse (vv.22-23) and he suffered the shame of losing the commendation and reward that could have been his (vv.24-26). What are we doing with the word of God? Are we fearful to promote it? Do we appreciate Him enough to preach it? *'The other servant had nothing to show for the pound entrusted to him. True, he had kept it safe - he had run no risks with it. He had moreover kept it clean - laid up in a napkin. Is not thus suggestive of Christians who are content if their lives are kept respectable and clean, but who remain unconcerned as whether their lives are useful! He had saved his pound but in saving it he had lost it. His colleagues had let their pounds go, but in doing so had saved them and gained more. How true it is that 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it'!* (JH Large).

¹ Note. There are **seven** occupations of the Lord's servants in His absence. These are: bearing fruit (Mark 4.29); inviting others to the feast (Matthew 22.3); tending the needy (Luke 10.35); keeping awake (Mark 13.36); caring for fellow servants (Luke 12.42); trimming the lamps (Matthew 25.7) and trading with what He has entrusted them (Luke 19.13).