

## Vision Night Message

January 3, 2021

*Occupy*

Text – Luke 19:1 - 27

Congregational Reading – Luke 19:11 - 13

### Introduction

One of the most discouraging things for a pastor is to see the people of his church begin to gradually fizzle out spiritually. Many who were once very zealous for the Lord, and very faithful to God's House, and very committed to fulfilling the Great Commission, and very separate from this world have already turned back and have forsaken God altogether. Some are gradually slipping away from Him, and others are just not growing in the Lord as they once did.

In our text today, we will look at two stories. The first is an historical narrative which involves a man – Zacchaeus - who gloriously gets saved and promises to give himself to the Lord completely.

The second is a parable where Jesus tells the story of a man who leaves on a long journey to go into a far country. This nobleman charges his servants to stay busy while he was away; to keep serving him until he returns. He gives each of the ten servants a certain amount of money to invest – one pound each, and they were expected to make that money grow. Some of them did what the Lord had asked and when he returned they were rewarded, but one in the story took what the Lord had given him and buried it in the ground and did nothing with it. When the Lord returned he had the original money given him by his lord, but no interest. The Lord rebuked him sharply for not doing anything with what he had been given.

The key verse connecting these stories is v. 11:

*"And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."*

(Luke 19:11)

The point of these two stories taken together is that many people start out very well for the Lord, but soon become weary in well-doing, and give up serving Him, and some don't do anything for the Lord.

The Lord wants us to occupy – stay busy for Him – until He comes.

Some people start out well, but they eventually quit.

Parallel Verses:

Turn to Matthew 13:1 – 9; 18 – 23

In the Parable of the Sower, there of four groups of people discussed. The Lord Jesus teaches us here that some never receive the seed of the Word of God because Satan steals it away. These people have been blinded by the god of this world. But, there are others that do receive the seed of the Word of God, but they never seem to grow in the Lord. Then there is a third group that do grow for a time, and even produce fruit for a while, but eventually they too fizzle out and lose interest, and become unfruitful. Only one group out of the four groups mentioned in this parable continue to grow in grace, and continue to produce fruit in their lives.

God wants us to continue going and growing for Him. He wants us to remain faithful even when the rest of Christianity is throwing in the towel:

*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: (1 Timothy 4:16a)*

*But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; (2 Timothy 3:14)*

*(Jesus said, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed [John 8:31];)*

*O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: (1 Timothy 6:20)*

*Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. (Proverbs 4:13)*

*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)*

*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. (Hebrews 2:1)*

Our Lord Jesus has gone on a long journey, but He is coming back for us:

*"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also." (John 14:1-3)*

As we read through these two stories, let us consider our own dedication to the Lord as we wait for His return. Are we using what the Lord has given us for His glory, or are we hiding out, mingling with the world around us, doing nothing of eternal value.

## I A New and Excited Convert (vs. 1 – 10)

Many of us start out like Zacchaeus, but the question is – will the Lord find us just as zealous when he comes.

## II An Necessary and Extended Continuation (v. 11)

In Jesus statement in verse eleven He alludes to the fact that the people had a misunderstanding regarding the timing of what He was doing. They thought He was going to set up the Kingdom immediately. However, Jesus was about to leave the earth and He would be gone for a very long time. The people would need to know what to do while they waited for His return.

## III A Narrated Exhortation to Continue – *Occupy - Stay Faithful and Busy Till I Come* (vs. 12 – 27)

Jesus gives them a parable – a story to illustrate the truth of staying faithful.

Jesus said, “*occupy* (Πραγματεύσασθε from πραγματεύομαι – *pragmateuomai*) *till I come*” (Luke 19:13), which means we are to stay busy serving Him until the time that He calls us home to Heaven. Don’t quit now, we are almost home. Don’t even slow down. If anything, things should pick up as the day of His return approaches.

*"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised); And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Stay focused in your faithfulness to attending church; to supporting this ministry with your tithes and offerings; to your service for the Lord; to your soul-winning efforts; to your loving support of the pastor and his family.

In the Book of Revelation Jesus reminds the churches of Asia Minor, and all of us, that He is coming back quickly. He told some of those churches that they needed to repent, He told one that they needed to hold fast to that which they already had. I would say to the members of this church that some of us need to repent about some things, and others need to just hold on to some things and not let them slip away. Why, because the Lord will soon return.

The Lord is coming soon. We need to stay focused on the task of sowing the seeds of the gospel to this lost world. Don’t allow the distractions of this world to veer you off of the path. Don’t

allow the devil to pull you out of God's will. Stay in the game until you hear the sound of the trumpet.

Turn to 2 Peter 3:3 – 4; 9 – 18

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)*

## **Conclusion**

Many are quitting today. There are countless illustrations that I could use to drive home the point that many Christians are quitting today. But I don't need to do that, because you all know a lot of examples of what I'm talking about yourself. Most of you know people who have fallen away, and you probably also know what the devil did to lure those folks out of God's will.

But I don't think the biggest problem in Christianity today are the "crash and burn" casualties. I think that the biggest problem we are seeing today in our churches is a spirit of apathy. God's people today are not living with the anticipation that the Lord will soon be returning. He's coming back! And, He expects you to have some fruit for Him when He returns. He expects you to do something with the pound of talents that He has given you. But, we also need to remember that we cannot quit until He comes. Don't stop doing what God wants you to do until He comes here to get you.

In 2021, we need to take to heart Jesus words in this parable – Occupy – stay bust – keep going – don't stop – until He comes. As a church, we need to move forward. We need to figure out how to strengthen the believers that are already here, and then we need to corporately go out and reach the lost with the gospel. We haven't been occupying in 2020; we've been hiding, and we need to change that. We need to occupy.

## Vision Night 2021

2021 was a very challenging year. Our church services were completely shut-down as far as in-person services are concerned for 15 weeks, and we were very limited for 9 months. We still managed to average 115 different people in church every week with 5 people baptized and 9 people joining the church. We actually took in \$7,000.00 more overall this year than last year. Our General Fund Giving was down very slightly from last year. The bad news is that we finished the year out at \$18,000.00 below our budgeted income. The good news is that we also spent about \$13,000.00 less than we were budgeted to spend. We will probably finish the year with a \$4,000.00 budget deficit. We still have not come to a final conclusion on the new budget for 2021. The deacons will work out a budget at the next deacons' meeting that you will hopefully approve of. We need to pray that 2021 is a better year financially.

**Missions** - finished very strongly. All missionaries were paid, and we will pay all of our missionaries for 4 months early in January. We have about \$4,500.00 in the Missions Fund. We support 30 missionaries. We have enough for our Scripture Assembly program, which costs around \$3,000.00 to do.

**Building** - \$39,000.00 was transferred from the General Fund to the Building Fund, plus an additional \$18,000.00 was given in offerings to the Building Fund for a total of \$57,000.00. Our building fund balance is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$226,000.00, which is right about where we started last year, but we spent about \$60,000.00 on the architectural and engineering plans, and also approvals for the new addition.

The building is on hold until the Spring. We are waiting for COVID to clear out, which will hopefully increase production of building supplies and also bring more bidders in.

## **Homeless Ministry**

Darla Griffin, Alisemary Becker, and Jackie Houck have been faithfully delivering food, other necessities, as well as the gospel to folks in Atlantic City.

## **Changes in the Music Ministry**

Mrs. Camillo will be taking a more prominent role in the choir and music ministries. She has the expertise in both music and determining whether or not the lyrics are sound doctrinally. Pretty much all choir specials and special music selections will go through her.

## **New Ministries**

Book Club – Pastor Phil Erickson

## **Relaunched Ministries**

Discipleship Program – Brother Derek Woodrum

Men's Ministry – Bob Fenton

Bus Ministry and Soulwinning – add mass mailing

More fellowship services – Sunday Nights outside by the fire pit; pot-luck dinners; etc.