

Westminster Seminary California  
**Divine Irony: An Exegetical Work on Luke 19:11-27**

submitted to Dr. S. M. Baugh  
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by Yi Wang  
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*Pericope: Luke 19:11-27*

**Introduction**

The parable of minas in Luke 19 has often been neglected. Not only has its originality been questioned due to the throne claimant plot in comparison to the parable in Matthew 25, its interpretations are divergent.<sup>1</sup> This paper is to deal with two basic questions: first, is Luke's parable a coherent account as it is; 2. how to interpret this parable in the larger narrative context of Luke-Acts. The answer to the first question is divided into three analyses: 1. narrative analysis; 2. historical analysis; 3. structural analysis. The answer to the second question follows the steps as such: the kingdom concept, the audiences, the king, the servants and the citizens. Thesis is that Luke's parable is a coherent account precisely because of its unique twofold plot. This parable functions in the larger narrative of Luke-Acts as a divine irony of the king.

**Part I: Is Luke's parable a coherent account?**

*Textual criticism*

In the textual variants, there are several places indicate the attempts to harmonize this parable with the one in Matthew 25:14-30. In verse 17, the commendation given to the servant εἶπε is assimilated with εἶ in Matt.25:23. The omission of verse 25 καὶ εἶπαν αὐτοῖς κύριε, ἔχει δέκα μνᾶς is possibly made by assimilation to Matthean

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<sup>1</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2008), 528–29.

parallel (25:28-29).<sup>2</sup> The addition of word *δοθησεται και περισσευθησεται* ( $f^{13}$  579. 2542 sy<sup>c</sup>) in verse 26, and the insertion of a whole phrase *και τον αχρειον δουλον εκβαλετε εις το σκοτος το εξωτερον· εκει εσται ο κλαυθος και ο βρυγμος των οδοντων* (D) at the end of verse 27 are likely due to such effort. Therefore, it is safe to say that the similarities between this parable in Luke 19 and the one in Matthew 25 have been long perceived since very early time. Furthermore, such effort of assimilation indicates that the assumption that these two parables are derived from a unified, single, original teaching of Jesus has been long standing.

### *Recent Scholarship*

This assumption has been predominantly held among the modern critical scholarship. Numerous theories have been developed over years in the attempt to interpret the relation between the two accounts. Darrell Bock summarizes four basic distinct positions on the relationship of the two passages: 1. they are variants of the same parable, with Matthew being responsible for reducing the parable; 2. they are variants of the same parable, with Luke being responsible for adding the parable; 3. Two parables are conflated: the parable of the minas and the parable of throne claimant; 4. The parables are two separate ones told in distinct settings.<sup>3</sup> Brian Schultz notices that, “the vast majority of commentators who uphold that whatever the ‘original’ teaching looked like, it would have been more similar to Matthews’s version than to Luke’s.”<sup>4</sup> More recently, Klyne Snodgrass makes a similar observation that the typical scholarly approach is to see them as two divergent accounts of a single original, where

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 144.

<sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, BECNT 3B (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 1996), 1527–8.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Schultz, “Jesus as Archelaus in the Parable of the Pounds (Lk 19:11-27),” *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 2 (2007): 108.

Matthew's account is closer the original but with an eschatological coloration, whereas Luke's version is an ineffective combination with two parables (that of minas and that of throne claimant).<sup>5</sup> Such position is due to some superficial observations. The throne claimant plot is regarded to be stiffly inserted into the rest of story which is complete by itself and similar to the parable in Matthew. Under this assumption and in favor of Matthew's straightforward structure and its fitting position in the eschatological discourse, the conclusion has been made is that Lukan redaction is more probable. After all, they suggest, the added throne claimant plot does not appear to contribute anything to the main themes of trust, faithfulness, and reward, which are so central to the parable. In fact, the slaughtering of the citizens at the end of the Luke's pericope (v. 27) seems to be totally unrelated to the actions of the servants, or in a worse case, it creates tensions in the narrative.<sup>6</sup> This leads to the question: Is Luke a faithful reporter of Jesus' teaching? Can the plot of throne claimant be coherent with the rest of the text? How is the twofold plot to be understood?

It is far beyond the purpose of this paper to make a comprehensive survey of different views on this issue. The position of this paper is that Luke and Matthew both faithfully report two distinct yet similar parables of Jesus in two different places.<sup>7</sup> The discussion focuses on the distinctive nature of Luke's account in comparison with Matthew's one, and then on its internal coherence as such.

#### *Narrative analysis: comparison with Matthew 25*

Although the similarities between Luke and Matthew are outstandingly acknowledgeable, the differences are often neglected. In order to illustrate the

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<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 529–30.

<sup>6</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, WBC 35C (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 910.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary Gospel According To St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1922), 437; Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London; Edinburgh: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1950), 476; Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 531.

distinctions of the two accounts, a concise horizontal comparison is given following the order of the fundamental elements in narrative literature: setting, audience, characters, plot, and details.

*Setting.* Luke places his parable *before* Jerusalem. It is the last teaching of Jesus prior to his entry. The presumable location in which Jesus told this parable could be either inside the city of Jericho or on the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem. Matthew, on the other hand, puts his parable *after* Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem and integrates it into Jesus' eschatological discourse. It is told in Jerusalem as the last part of Jesus' teaching prior to the passion. Both occasions are at very crucial and memorable moments of Jesus' earthly ministry. And it is hard to see how Luke (or Matthew) could make such serious confusion of the setting.

*Audience.* In Matthew, the parable is part of the large block of Jesus' teaching to the disciples. So the audience is exclusively the disciples. However, in Luke, the audience is a complex. In general, Luke intentionally specifies Jesus' audience in the journey narrative.<sup>8</sup> He does so in 19:11, when this parable is connected to the story of Zacchaeus by a genitive absolute ἀκούόντων δε αυτών ταῦτα. The reference of the audience is the people who heard Jesus' words in v.9-10, which goes back to the πάντες in verse 7, which is the crowd of followers and people from Jericho in the story of Zacchaeus. The significance of the audience identification will be discussed later, but the point is that the audiences are very different.

*Characters.* In Matthew's parable, the characters are plainly a businessman plus his 3 servants, two faithful, one unfaithful. But Luke's parable is intricate. First, there is a

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<sup>8</sup> A. W. Mosley, "Jesus' Audiences in the Gospels of St Mark and St Luke," *New Testament Studies* 10, no. 1 (October 1963): 139–49, doi:10.1017/S0028688500002691.

man born in high status (ἄνθρωπος εὐγενής) who later acquires (λαβεῖν) a kingdom and becomes a king. Then, there are 10 servants mentioned in the beginning. Three of them are treated closely, two are faithful, one is not.<sup>9</sup> It is presumable that the other seven are among the bystanders. Additionally, there are some citizens who reject his authority, among whom a delegation is sent to announce their rejection to the nobleman. A king is very different from a businessman. Plus the peculiar characters such as the hating citizens and delegation bring the focus not on the issue of kingly authority, rather than the stewardship of the servants.

*Plot.* Matthew's plot is straightforward. The businessman gives money to three servants per their abilities. When he comes back, he rewards the two faithful and capable servants and judges the third evil and lazy servant. In Luke's parable, there are two plots interwoven together. One plot is similar to Matthew's. The nobleman gives money equally to ten servants before he departs. When he comes back, he rewards the first two servants and judges the third evil servant. The other plot is unique. There are some citizens of his dominion hate him. After the king departs, they send a delegation to reject him. When he comes back as a king, he commands to slaughter them before his presence. The plot of throne claimant stands out and has been targeted as the result of Lukan redaction. But it is enough to say that as a final form Luke's twofold plot is distinct from Matthew's straightforward narrative.

*Details.* There are other differences in details. For instance, In Luke each servant gets one mina equally (v.12-13), whereas in Matthew the amounts differ according to their ability. In Luke, there is a specific command, πραγματεύσασθε (v.13), but no

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<sup>9</sup> The omission of the other seven servants is often used as an evidence of Lukan redaction. However, this is not something unique to Luke. Matthew did the same omission in the parable of Workers in Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16), where of five groups hired, only two are treated. See Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 527.

command is given in Matthew. In Luke there is no description of the servants' action, but in Matthew their efforts are detailed. Thus the focus in Luke is on the king, but in Matthew is on the servants. In Luke, a command is given to slaughter the rebellious citizen, whereas in Matthew the command is to cast the third servant into the outer darkness.

In summary, the narrative comparison indicates that there are various significant differences between the two accounts. They differ in all the narrative criteria: the setting, the audience, the characters, the plot, and many details. It is strongly likely, if not conclusively, that they are two independent and distinct parables. However, this does not answer the question that whether Luke's account as such is a coherent piece or not. A historical background investigation illuminates how to solve the difficulty lies on the throne claimant plot.

*Historical analysis: nobleman and Archelaus*

The starting point is the setting of this parable. Luke carefully records the location. As stated above, the possible setting of this parable may be either inside the city of Jericho (v.1), perhaps even in the house of Zacchaeus (v.5-7, 9), or on the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem (v.11).<sup>10</sup> In any case, Jericho is in the scene. As Josephus recorded, when Herod Archelaus was appointed Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea, he rebuilt the Herodian palace which had been at Jericho, and he also built a city in the north of Jericho and named it Archelais after himself (*Ant.* 17.340). After ten-year reign (4 BC- 6 AD) of Archelaus, the leaders in Judea and Samaria joined together to accuse him before Caesar for his cruelty and tyranny. Eventually he was deposed and banished by Caesar to Vienne in Gaul. His principality was placed under

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, AB 28A (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1218–27.

the administrative supervision of the province of Syria (*Ant.* 17. 342-344, 354). Thus, Archelaus was the last non-Roman ruler in Judea, and Jericho was the city of his government. Schultz points out that there are direct archeological evidences of the repairs and use of Herod's third palace complex. It was used during the first half of the first century.<sup>11</sup> This means that during Jesus' day, the palace was still there.

What is more intriguing is that the throne claimant plot in this parable is extremely similar to Archelaus' story. According to Josephus, when Archelaus was in Rome, there was an embassy of fifty Jews sent by the authority of the nation to Rome after him:

“But as for Archelaus, he had new sources of trouble come upon him at Rome, on the occasions following: for an embassy of the Jews was come to Rome, Varus having permitted the nation to send it, that they might petition for the liberty of living by their own laws. Now the number of the ambassadors that were sent by the authority of the nation were fifty, to which they joined above eight thousand of the Jews that were at Rome already.” (*Ant.* 17.299-300)

Their desire was that they might obtain dissolution of kingly government and might be put under Roman civil authority of Syria (*Ant.* 17.300, 314). In Luke's parable, the citizens who hated the nobleman sent a delegation and they said the same thing: “We do not want this man to reign over us.” (v.14). With the hope of being free from the king, the delegation accused Herod of his iniquities, especially his cruelty and severe demand on money:

[W]hen, upon unjust pretenses, he had slain any of the nobility, he took away their estates; and when he permitted any of them to live, he condemned them to the forfeiture of what they possessed. And besides the annual impositions which he laid upon every one of them, they were to make liberal presents... because there was no way of obtaining a freedom from unjust violence without giving either gold or silver for it. (*Ant.* 17.307)

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<sup>11</sup> Schultz, “Jesus as Archelaus,” 114–15.

People were living in fear and anxiety under his rule. It resembles to the words of the third servant that he was afraid of the king (φοβέω), because he was a severe (αύστηρός) man. He take what he did not deposit, and reap what he did not sow (v.21). Before he came to be enthroned, Archelaus ordered to slaughter three thousands of Jews at the Temple (*Ant.* 17.313). This relates to the slaughter of the citizens in the end of the parable (v.27).

Now, with the historical background in mind, it is time to deal with the previous questions. While most of the scholars assume that Luke's parable is a result of later redactional work adding on a second plot of the throne claimant, it is difficult to see why a later Christian redactor would choose a cruel, hated figure to be inserted into the scene, especially if the plot of minas has already established a positive figure to represent Jesus. As Weinert states:

What sense could a Christian audience possibly make out of the image of a delegation sent after Jesus to prevent his heavenly enthronement? ...how could a Christian audience reconcile the ruler's vengeful treatment of his enemies...? If early Christians created this story as an allegory, then they must also be responsible for introducing two important narrative features which are allegorically unintelligible from a Christian point of view.<sup>12</sup>

Taken into consideration of the unmistakable similarities to the historical events of Archelaus, and the precise location where Jesus' teaching of this parable was taken place as Luke records in the context, it is unlikely to deduce that the throne claimant was a later redactional insertion. On the contrary, it is more reasonable to conclude that Luke's account of the parable is fitting with the setting, and thus is a trustworthy report. When the crowd passed by the city of Jericho, probably with a sight of the enormous palace of Archelaus, which kind of parable would Jesus tell: a parable merely with minas plot or this parable in Luke's account? It makes sense that Jesus

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<sup>12</sup> Francis D. Weinert, "Parable of the Throne Claimant (Luke 19:12, 14-15a, 27) Reconsidered," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October 1977): 507.

would use the story of Archelaus to form his provocative and unpredictable teaching. After all, the nature of Jesus' teaching is difficult and unexpected.

*Structural analysis: internal coherence*

Moreover, the twofold plot does not undermine the coherence in the parable. On the contrary, the structure of this parable as such does suggest a more unified internal coherence. This parable is well-structured with this twofold plot flowing in the narrative:

19:11: Introduction to the parable (communication between author and reader)

*A. 19:12-14: First Part (setting of the narrative)*

- a) 19:12: A nobleman departs in order to receive a kingdom.
- b) 19:13: He entrusts a sum of money to his servants in order to engage in trade;
- c) 19:14: however, because his fellow citizens hate him, they send an emissary after him to prevent him from becoming king.

*B. 19:15-27: Second Part (development of the plot)*

- a') 19:15: The nobleman returns after receiving the kingdom,
- b') 19:15b-26: He settles accounts with his servants, rewarding those who have earned money, and giving them responsibility over a number of cities. He punishes the one who has hidden his pound.
- c') 19:27: There is a cruel retaliation against those who did not want him to become king.

19:28: Conclusion (travel notice, communication between author and reader).<sup>13</sup>

Luke's parable is carefully structured. It consists of two parts (19:12-14 and 19:15-27) which, in turn, are further divided into three corresponding parts (a, b, c and a', b', c') and are enclosed by the redactional frame of verses 11 and 28. Furthermore, the throne claimant plot actually helps bind the whole parable together. Why is the third servant afraid of this king? Why does he describe the king as a severe man? Only in light of the cruelty of the king and the hatred of the citizens implied in the throne

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<sup>13</sup> Adopted from Adelbert Denaux, "The Parable of the King-Judge (Lk 19,12-28) and Its Relation to the Entry Story (Lk 19,29-44)," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der älteren Kirche* 93, no. 1-2 (2002): 45.

claimant plot are such behaviors and reply of the third servant to be better understood. Another interweaving feature is the reward to the faithful servants and kingly identity of their master. The reward in this parable is much more concrete than Matthew's account. In Matthew, the reward is being set over much, and entering into the joy of the master, which is ambiguous. What is "much"? What is the "joy of the master"?<sup>14</sup> Whereas in Luke, the reward is clearer: because of their faithfulness, the king now grants them with the administrative authority over cities. And it coheres well with the identity and narrative of the nobleman acquiring his kingship and return. A businessman cannot grant civil authority. Only a king can. In short, it is not hard to understand the correlation between the two plots, that of nobleman seeking kingship and that of master entrusting money to servants. They are not in conflict with each other, they do not stand on their own but internally coherent, they are unlikely artificially combined by a redactor.

In conclusion, Luke's account of this parable is reliable; the throne claimant plot does not undermine the coherence of the parable but on the contrary bind the parable together as a whole. Now, if Luke is faithful in reporting Jesus' own teaching in this occasion, why then would Jesus use Archelaus in his teaching? How would the hearers react to this parable? How does this parable function in the context in Luke-Acts?

## **Part II: Interpret the parable in the larger narrative in Luke-Acts**

Now the focus shifts from the narrative within the parable to the larger narrative in which the parable is told. There are two interpretative principles that are assumed at

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<sup>14</sup> It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss about the Matthew's parable. The questions are not meant to undermine Matthew's authenticity, but merely a rhetorical technique.

work: first, Luke-Acts is a single, continuous literary work. The book of Acts develops and in turn interprets the main theme in Luke's Gospel. Second, Luke intends to give his audience certainty (*ασφάλεια*) by writing his story in sequence (*καθεξής*) as he says in 1:3. That means it is important not only the content of his account, but the placement and order of events. Taken in mind these two principles, the questions are to be addressed: What is the purpose of this parable at this particular point? What is the meaning of the story to the hearers in the journey with Jesus and to Luke's readers respectively?

*Kingdom: Distant or Imminent?*

The traditional allegorical interpretation of this parable can be summarized as following: first, the parable primarily refers to the ascension of Jesus and his distant return at the parousia for judgment; second, Jesus' purpose of telling this parable was to discourage any misunderstanding about the entry of Jesus in Jerusalem as the inauguration of the messianic kingdom; third, Luke's intention was to show his readers that Jesus himself predicted the long period of his absence before the parousia and they are to be faithful and profitable in service.<sup>15</sup> But, there are several problems: firstly, the plot of throne claimant seems almost to be put aside in this interpretative method; secondly, unlike the parable of talents in Matthew, this parable has nothing to say what happened during the absence of the king; thirdly, it puts too much theological burden on a parable.

Johnson challenges this understanding, arguing that the intention is not refuting the expectation of imminent appearance of the kingdom, but confirm it.<sup>16</sup> However, his

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<sup>15</sup> Plummer, *Luke*, 439, 444; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 700–01; Schultz, "Jesus as Archelaus," 140–41.

<sup>16</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Lukan Kingship Parable (Lk 19:11-27)," *Novum Testamentum* 24, no. 2 (April 1982): 159.

own argument is also defective. First of all, he goes through the parables in Luke affirming that only once Jesus tells a parable explicitly to refute an understanding of his audience.<sup>17</sup> It is a problematic statement. No doubt that Jesus does confirm something in his audience: their perception, their request, or their exclamation, but Jesus always challenges their *presumptions* of the kingdom of God. For instance, in the parable of Great Banquet, Jesus rebuts their expectation of the people about who will eat in the kingdom of God by saying “none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet” (14:24). In the parables of the lost sheep (15:4-7), lost coin (15:8-10) and lost son (15:11-32), Jesus subverts the understanding of the scribes and Pharisees about who will be accepted in the kingdom.<sup>18</sup>

Luke cannot make this more explicit that the followers of Jesus did not understand his teaching on the kingdom until the Pentecost (9:45, 54; 18:15-16, 34). Their conception of the kingdom as a geo-political entity is explicitly reflected in Act. 1:6: “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” When Luke gives the reason why Jesus tells this parable in the first place (19:11), he points out the immediate appearance of this geo-political messianic kingdom is what the crowd thought, not what Jesus would think. Notice that there are two parts of the reason given in 19:11. The first is τὸ ἐγγὺς εἶναι Ἰερουσαλὴμ αὐτὸν, and the second is καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι. The first is a fact, the second is an opinion. If Luke’s intention was to confirm this expectation as a fact, why not simply say καὶ παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι? It is more concise and coherent with the first part in linguistic structure and style. Obviously, Luke’s purpose of inserting δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς is to clarify that it is what the crowd supposes, not what Jesus thinks. Although Johnson rightly points out that the

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<sup>17</sup> Johnson, “The Lukan Kingship Parable,” 146.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Johnson, “The Lukan Kingship Parable,” 147–48.

traditional interpretation of this parable as a teaching on a delay of second Parousia goes too far in an allegorical direction, his own argument also stretches the text too much to assert that Jesus confirms the imminent appearance of the kingdom.

Secondly, his argument correlates with his understanding of the kingdom of God which is shown in the words as following:

If the function of the parable is to confirm the expectation of 19:11, then Luke illustrates something about this kingdom, and those who reject it. And by having Jesus proclaimed as king in 19:38, he says something about the relation of Jesus to this Kingdom. This is straightforward...If the point of the parable is to clarify a misconception contained in 19:11, how does it do this? Does it assert that messianic rule over Israel is not the same thing as the Kingdom of God, although Jesus is proclaimed as king in the entry? Does it assert that the rule of Jesus over God's people is not yet the full realization of God's rule and Kingdom?<sup>19</sup>

He seems to confuse Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem with realization of the kingdom of God. But the fact is that Jesus did not even rule over Israel for a day. If Jesus were to confirm their expectation of a geo-political kingdom and if the account of his entry were meant to be the inauguration of full realization of God's kingdom, Jesus should have been still ruling in Jerusalem till today. This is what the crowd were thinking when they welcomed him as a king into Jerusalem. But Jesus did not make himself enthroned in Jerusalem, but was crucified. And when Jesus was caught, they were scared and scattered, for it did not conform to their expectation. Even after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples still did not understand all these things. If one wants to find an explicit rebuke of Jesus on the wrong expectation of the kingdom of God, here Jesus made one to these two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "O foolish ones" (24:25). With the whole picture in mind, it is not hard to see Jesus would refute their view of an imminent appearance of the kingdom.

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, "The Lukan Kingship Parable," 150–51.

Thirdly, in order to uphold the assertion that Jesus confirms people's expectation of the full realization of kingdom, he has to go so far to make a symbolical interpretation on the slaughter of the rebels, as a "cut-off" of the leadership of Jews from a restored Israel.<sup>20</sup> He makes a good case that this parable needs to be interpreted not only in the context of the previous section, but also in the following passage. He argues that this parable has the same pattern of the narrative follows it. Jesus was acclaimed as βασιλεύς; then the Pharisees rejected him (19:39); in response, Jesus spoke words of judgment over their city (19:41-44); "[t]hus completing the pattern: the leaders who reject Jesus are themselves rejected."<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, it is important to interpret the parable with the subsequent events. However, the parallelism is strained. It is unclear that how Jesus' lament over Jerusalem turns out to be an announcement of judgement. Moreover, following the narrative, v.40 is already the response to the Pharisees. And the lament happened in a different scene. So it is farfetched to say the lament is a response to Pharisees. In addition, how does the rejection of Pharisees result in a national destruction? They were merely a religious sect, not national representatives of Jews.

The verb κατασφάζω only appear once in NT, but the theme of vengeance and slaughter is repeatedly mentioned throughout the OT prophecies.

"Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. (Isa. 35:4-6)

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God. (Isa. 61:1-2)

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson, "The Lukan Kingship Parable," 156–57.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, "The Lukan Kingship Parable," 156–57.

It is interesting that when Jesus replied the disciples of John the Baptist about his messiahship, he only quoted these prophecies focusing on the salvation (Lk.7:22), but omitted the part of vengeance. It is precise what John the Baptist and Jews in general expected messiah to do: taking vengeance for Israel, bringing judgement upon the nations, purging the land from Gentiles and sinners, and establishing a new geopolitical kingdom of Israel. When they believed Jesus was the messiah, this was what they were looking forward to. But Jesus did not do any of it. That is why John questioned his messiahship (7:19). Jesus' first advent did not bring vengeance and judgement, but salvation. The judgement is saved in the last day (Lk. 11:31-32; 22:30; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev.22:12). The destruction of Jerusalem is fulfillment of the prophecies (Lk.21:22), but it pictures the greater judgement to come.<sup>22</sup>

In brief, the traditional interpretation takes this parable too far to make a theological implication of remote second Parousia and stewardship during Jesus' absence. But the assertion that Jesus confirming the crowd's expectation of an imminent kingdom is also problematic. Jesus did not enthrone in the way that people expected, regardless of the fact that the crowd welcomed him as a king at his entry. Luke makes clear to his readers that kingdom of God is still future (17:20; 21:7; Act.1:6).

*Paradoxical audiences: excited but grumbling*

It is certain that Luke depicts the excitement of disciples and crowd as they approached Jerusalem, not to confirm their expectation, but make a surprising turn out of it. This excitement reached its climax at the triumphant entry, and suddenly turned into confusion and panic when their king was caught and executed. But Luke accurately keeps track of the upsurge of this excitement mood when they approached

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<sup>22</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 1543.

Jerusalem. Jesus was regarded as υἱὸς Δαβὶδ (18:38-39). His miracle of healing the blind increased the excitement of the crowd (v.43). People were convinced that this was the Messiah. When they came into Jericho, Jesus announced that he came to save υἱὸς Ἀβραάμ (19:9-10), and that σωτηρία came σήμερον (v.9). All of these words stimulate the excitement for an imminent realization of the kingdom, echoing the prophecies at his birth (see 1:32, 55, 68-79; 2:29-32).

However, Luke leaves a hint that the crowds were not fully satisfied with this messiah (v.7). The relation between audiences of the parable and Jesus is complex. In one sense, they are in a positive relation, because the audiences are following Jesus and presumably regard him as messiah. From another perspective, they are in a negative relation, because they are grumbling for what Jesus does. And Jesus constantly goes to the opposite way from what they expect.

Johnson recognizes that the audience is a mix of disciples, generic crowd and opponents. He also correctly points out that this parable addresses all of them.<sup>23</sup> The only problem of his understanding is that it is not only the hypothetical “opponents” who grumble, but “all” grumble, including the disciples and generic crowd.<sup>24</sup> It is not difficult to catch it. Luke makes it clear that he wants his readers to see that everyone misunderstood, including the disciples. The disciples wanted to tell fire to consume the people who refuse (9:54); they rebuked those who brought infants to Jesus (18:15). The crowd rebuked the blind man who recognized Jesus as Son of David (18:39), and they also grumbled for Zacchaeus. They saw these people as sinners, filthy and unworthy for the kingdom. They thought that messiah would bring judgement upon the sinners like a consuming fire, not receive them in compassion. They wanted a

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, “The Lukan Kingship Parable,” 145–46.

<sup>24</sup> Plummer, *Luke*, 438.

messiah in their own terms. But Jesus challenges them. He used the parable to address everyone in the scene. In a certain sense, everyone is an opponent to Jesus' kingship. They are excited, but also grumbling. This affects the interpretation of this parable.

*Cruelty and lavish grace of the King*

Now Jesus uses what he finds in the immediate surroundings, the story of Archelaus in this case, to respond to their false excitement and complaint of his messiahship. It is a warning to their inner rebellion and unbelief, but also a call to fully submit to his gracious kingship even it is not what they expected. And Jericho is most fitting place to address these issues. The magnificent Herodian palace would definitely evoke their thoughts of the last Jewish king of Judea Archelaus who was known for his cruelty and mercilessness. And this is not merely part of the circumstantial setting which Jesus used in crafting his parable to more effectively communicate his message, it is his message.<sup>25</sup>

This message has multifaceted effects. In the first place, Jesus challenges their expectation of messiah; at the same time explicitly affirm the severity of his judgement. In the beginning of the journey narrative, when the Samaritans refuse to receive (δέχομαι) Jesus, the disciples want to bring immediate judgement on them. But Jesus rebukes them and tells that he comes not to destroy lives, but to save them (9:51-56). In the end of the journey narrative, when Zacchaeus receives (ὑποδέχομαι) Jesus, the crowds grumble because Zacchaeus was a sinner. In both occasions, Luke makes it clear that they supposed that Jesus came to bring judgement. So Jesus was using this parable to question them: do you stumble for my mercy toward sinners? Do you stumble for I said that today (σήμερον) is a day of salvation (σωτηρία)? There will be a day of the Lord, cruel with wrath and fierce anger (Is. 13:9), as the day of

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Schultz, "Jesus as Archelaus," 116.

Archelaus. Surely, the judgement of the messiah-king will take place, and it will be even much more severe than what Archelaus did. It will take place when I come (ἔρχομαι). The authority of messiah-king is unquestionable.

Secondly, Jesus exposes their inner rebellion toward him. Neither the crowd nor the disciples submitted completely to Jesus' kingship, simply because they did not fully understand it. Their grumbling was a sign of their rejection and rebellion. They wanted a king only in their own terms. Thus soon later, they abandoned him on the cross as the king of Jews who did not conform to their expectations (23:13). Even the disciple who swore to die with him denied him three times (22:54-62). Therefore, though they thought they were the ones who had the right understanding of Jesus' kingship, in reality they denied him just like the citizens denied the king. The principle in the parable: παντὶ τῷ ἔχοντι δοθήσεται, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ μὴ ἔχοντος καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται. Interestingly, during the account settlement, all three servants acknowledged that their minas belong to the king, yet only the third servant said that he had it (εἶχον). But the judgement of the king is that he was the one who did not have (μὴ ἔχοντος). In his reply to the third servant, μου τὸ ἀργύριον (v.23), the emphasis is on μου. It is *my* money, not yours. For those who thought they had, what they had will be taken away and be given to those who did not think they were worthy to have.

Jesus was announcing his lavish grace. The king in the parable resembles Archelaus only in the way of how he judges the rebellious and the disobedient. In this parable, this king treats the first two servants utterly differently. For the faithfulness proved on a little amount of money, he grants them authorities over cities (ἐξουσία ἐπάνω πόλεων). This is incredibly lavish reward. He shares his authority with his servants, making them the co-rulers of his kingdom! This is definitely not Archelaus. The

phrase in the parable implies this: ἤδεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος ἀσπτηρός εἰμι (v.22): “Do you know that *I* am a severe man?” *I* am different. *I* am not a king who exploits his people for his own interest; *I* am a king who grants you much more than you could earn for yourself – the kingdom itself. Later, Jesus confirmed this point to his disciples, even they were still confused, that he would assign them a kingdom, and they would sit on the throne (22:29). But how could this be possible? Earlier in the journey, Jesus said: the one who denies (ἀρνέομαι) him will be denied before the angels of God (12:9). And Peter, as a representative of disciples, denied (ἠρνήσατο) Jesus when he was arrested (22:57). How could anyone be accepted before him?

*Divine irony: the king will be slaughtered!*

This leads to the most intriguing part of this parable: it is a great divine irony. The people thought that in order to gain the kingdom, they must assist the king to conquer the land and chase the enemies out. The victory must be established upon the slaughter of the rebellious citizens. And based on their cooperation with the messiah, they could merit the reward in the kingdom. However, this is not the way how the kingdom of God works. The later account in Luke makes it clear that no one really understands. They cannot gain the kingdom of God by themselves. It must be earned for them. In order to grant the kingdom of God to his citizens, the king must die for them, even when they are rebellious against him. The messiah-king did not come to slaughter anyone; on the contrary, the rebellious citizens slaughtered the king! Though the term κατασφάζω only appear once, but its synonym σφάζω appears several times in the NT, mostly used to describe Jesus as the lamb who has been slaughtered (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8). This slaughter is not by accident, but the plan predestinated for the messiah-king. Luke places this parable right before Jesus’ final

journey to Jerusalem poignantly functions as a great divine irony foreseeing what will happen in the future: The king will be slaughtered before the rebellious citizens.

In summary, Luke accurately pictures the excitement of the people. The grumbling is not done by the “opponents” but by “all”, including the disciples. So this parable addresses everyone as opponent. It has multifaceted effect. It affirms the cruelty of the judgement of the king. It exposes the secret rebellion in their hearts. It reveals the lavish reward, co-ruling authority with the king. And most significantly, it functions as a divine irony of how this extravagant grace could be given even to the rebels and disobeying servants.

### *Servants and Citizens*

After dealing with the kingdom and the king, it is time to talk about the servants and the citizens. How to understand these two groups of people? Do the servants or the citizens refer to believers? What about the third servant? Some suggest that the third servant refers to Jewish leaders; some think he only loses his reward, but is punished as the rebellious citizens, therefore refers to carnal believers; some associate him with the one in Matthew’s account.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to see that the citizens and servants are both under the king’s authority. In both groups, there are some who are faithful and obedient to the king, and there are some who are rebellious and disobedient. So there is a parallel between them. The servants are also citizens. And the disobedience of the third servant manifests his rejection to the king. The third servant himself is a rebellious citizen, thus will receive punishment. Furthermore, the conjunction *πλήν* does not necessarily function as

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<sup>26</sup> For the view of Jewish leadership, see Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke, Revised edition (London: SCM Press, 1963), 61–62; Johnson, “The Lukan Kingship Parable,” 156; Geldenhuys, *Luke*, 475; Plummer, *Luke*, 443; Bock, *Luke*, 1542.

adversative which gives an idea that the treatment to the rebellious citizens is something in contrast with that to the third servant. As BDF (§449-2) points out, πλήν is also used “to conclude a discussion.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, BDAG indicates πλήν can function as “breaking off a discussion and emphasizing what is important.”<sup>28</sup> This is exactly the last sentence of the parable. If it is the case, then 19:27 concludes the whole discourse of judgement and emphasizes its essential part, which is the capital punishment. Moreover, the variant reading τοὺς ἐχθρούς μου ἐκεῖνους (A (D) N W Γ Δ Θ Ψ f<sup>1.13</sup> 565. 579. 700. 892. 1424. 2542 ℞) is considered by the majority as a correction of τούτους. If τούτους is the original, it implies that the third servant is included in the category of enemy. Moreover, the condemnation of the king is that the third servant is πονηρός (19:22). And in another similar parable found in Luke 12, the other servant is slaughtered and put with the unfaithful (Lk.12:46). Let alone the strong parallelism to the Matthew’s parable where the third servant is cast out into outer darkness (Matt. 25:29-30). All of these evidences imply that the third servant receives the same punishment as part of the enemy of the king.

## Conclusion

This paper addresses two general questions: first, is Luke’s account coherent and reliable; second, how to interpret this parable in the context of the larger narrative in Luke-Acts. There are three analyses given to answer the first question: 1. a narrative analysis focusing on the distinctive nature of Luke’s parable; 2. a historical analysis, shedding light on the throne claimant plot by correlating with the historical background of Archelaus; 3. structural analysis, establishing the internal coherence of

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 234.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 826 see 1.c.

the twofold plot. The conclusion is that Luke's account of this parable is externally evident in history and internally coherent in structure. With respect to the second question, the answer is put in order as such: 1. kingdom; 2. audience; 3. king; 4. servants and citizens. This parable is not a confirmation to the crowds' supposition that the kingdom was not imminently realized as a geo-political entity at Jesus' entry. The audiences of this parable are the paradoxical crowds, including the disciples, the generic mass, and the opponents, who were excited about the arrival of messiah, but grumbled about his works. Jesus uses this parable to affirm the severity of his judgement, to expose the inner rebellion of his followers, and to announce the lavish grace and reward. The most important point is that this parable is a divine irony: the king was to be slaughtered before the rebellious citizens. Lastly, the third servant is an enemy of the king, thus would be punished accordingly. Thus this parable is not of watchfulness or stewardship, but of recognition and submission to Jesus as a king who was slaughtered for his people.

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