

Luke 19:11-27 — The Parable of the Ten Minas

(Matthew 25:14–30)

11 While the people were listening to this, Jesus proceeded to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and they thought the kingdom of God would appear imminently. 12 So he said, “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to lay claim to his kingship and then return. 13 Beforehand, he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Conduct business with this until I return,’ he said.

14 But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We do not want this man to rule over us.’

15 When he returned from procuring his kingship, he summoned the servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what each one had earned.

16 The first servant came forward and said, ‘Master, your mina has produced ten more minas.’ 17 His master replied, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very small matter, you shall have authority over ten cities.’

18 The second servant came and said, ‘Master, your mina has made five minas.’ 19 And to this one he said, ‘You shall have authority over five cities.’

20 Then another servant came and said, ‘Master, here is your mina, which I have laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 For I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man. You withdraw what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow.’

22 His master replied, ‘You wicked servant, I will judge you by your own words. So you knew that I am a harsh man, withdrawing what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why then did you not deposit my money in the bank, and upon my return I could have collected it with interest?’

24 Then he told those standing by, ‘Take the mina from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ 25 ‘Master,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’

26 He replied, ‘I tell you that everyone who has will be given more; but the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 27 And these

enemies of mine who were unwilling for me to rule over them, bring them here and slay them in front of me.”

13 That is, he gave each servant one mina. A mina was most likely a silver coin worth a hundred drachmas, that is, about a hundred days' wages.

20 Greek *soudariō*

What had just happened at Zacchaeus' house astonished everyone who witnessed it. The chief tax collector of Jericho, who had massively enriched himself by extorting people, had promised to give half his ill-gotten possessions to the poor and return his cheatings fourfold. Surely the Kingdom of God was upon them!

And since the Jews expected only one climactic coming of God in history (Utley), Jesus understood the need to adjust the crowd's expectations. In the words of the Pulpit Commentary, Jesus told this parable "to moderate the wild romantic enthusiasm of his immediate followers and of the Passover crowds by painting for them a quiet picture of the future of work and waiting which lay before them."

v.12

The story Jesus told was beautifully layered: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to lay claim to his kingship and then return." On one level, he is preparing the crowds for the fact that a (long) period of time will pass before God's kingdom ultimately is established. At another level, he is leveraging a brutal custom of the day by which a newly appointed king demonstrated what fate awaited those who rejected his sovereignty.

In historical fact, both Herod and Archelaus had traveled to Rome to submit to Caesar Augustus their claims to rule the Jews. Ironically, both had traveled from Jericho. (Pulpit, referring to Josephus, "Antiquities," 14:14; 17:9) Jesus also was pointing to the fact that he, who was by nature God (Philippians 2:6), would ascend to heaven and take his seat at the right hand of the Father. (Hebrews 10:12) All that, of course, would happen after he had been executed, buried, and

resurrected – and after a period of time had passed that we now know would be many hundreds of years.

v.13

The master “called ten of his servants” — not butlers, maids, and valets as we might think of servants, but household slaves (*doulous*, S1401). He gave each of them a “mina,” a very small amount that many commentaries go to great lengths to quantify. However, the Pulpit Commentary observes: “The paltriness of the sum given them seems to suggest what a future lay before them. No sharing in what they hoped for – the glories of a Messianic kingdom on earth. No rest in repose under the shadow of the mighty throne of King Messiah.”

For Jesus’ purpose, the size of the trusts did not matter so much as the fact that each slave was given an equal amount. The master commands them to “conduct business with this until I return.” Ellicott observes that the “better manuscripts” render “until I return” as “while I am coming” – which would remind us that Christ certainly will return and, in God’s time, one might say he is already returning.

The point is that each of the ten was given an equal opportunity to conduct business with what his master had given him.

v.14

“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation” — The Jewish leaders in fact did this when Archelaus petitioned Augustus to succeed his deceased father, Herod. (Ellicott, who also offers the interesting side note that a second such delegation later succeeded and Archelaus was deposed and banished to Gaul.) One can take this aspect of the parable to predict the rejection of Jesus by the Jews who would demand his crucifixion.

v.15

“When he returned from procuring his kingship” — The parable now shifts to the return of the new king to call each servant to account for what he had “earned” by his stewardship of the master’s mina. We also note the implication of our King’s return: the second coming of Christ.

vv.16-19

The first servant called to account had an excellent report: a 900% increase in his trust. You can hear the approving tone in the master's voice: "Well done, good servant." The second servant presented a respectable report of a 400% increase, but did not hear the master say, "Well done."

Alistair Begg offers a fascinating observation: These two servants do not say, "I did this with your mina." Rather they tell the master, "Your mina did this."¹ Christ's servants must never think for a moment that any Kingdom accomplishment is theirs. Whatever increase we see can only come by the grace and power of the Lord.

The slaves certainly were astonished by the breathtaking rewards the master doled out. For stewarding such small amounts, they were given authority over multiple cities! But hadn't Jesus taught, "Whoever is faithful with very little will also be faithful with much"? (Luke 16:10)

The dramatic increase of the master's mina investments brings to mind Jesus' Parable of the Sower. (8:4-15) The seed sown on good soil sprang up and produced a hundredfold crop. The master had been testing the servants' faithfulness to determine which were "good soil."

vv.20-21

The third slave must have reported with his head bowed in shame: "Master, here is your mina, which I have laid away in a piece of cloth." And why did this slave not have even the slightest increase to report? Fear.

"I was afraid of you, because you are a harsh man." The Greek word for 'harsh' (*austēros*, S840) gives us the English word 'austere.' It was commonly applied to unripe fruit and meant sour, unpleasant, harsh. (Barnes) It was used for "an exacting, strict, penny-pincher and letter-of-the-law type of personality." (Utley) Barnes goes on to note: The word in this case "means that the man was taking every advantage and, while he lived in idleness, was making his living out of the toils of others. ... We are not to suppose [however] that God is unjust or austere."

This third servant, though, was afraid of more than his master's demanding nature. He also feared risk – the possibility of losing the mina in a bad investment, instead of multiplying it like the others. Taylor writes: “He was so afraid of doing anything amiss, that he did nothing at all. The representative of the great multitude of hearers of the gospel, who simply do nothing whatever about it. They do not oppose it; they do not laugh at it; they do not argue against it; their worst enemies would not call them immoral; but they neglect the great salvation.”

Far too many “Christians” do nothing about the gospel. They cower in fear of discipleship's risks. Jesus had warned about this, using the image of a man who started building a tower without first calculating whether he had what would be required to finish it. (14:28-33) Many are concerned their neighbors would ridicule them for building the tower or failing to finish what they started, when they should be terrified of the returning master by whose command they were to build it.

vv.22-23

“You wicked servant” — What was evil about this third slave?

To begin with, ‘wicked’ translates *ponēre* (S4190), which also can be rendered ‘bad’ and ‘slothful.’ The heart of his wickedness was that he was too lazy or unconcerned to do the minimum he knew his master expected.

Consider Benson's quote: “It is a great evil not to do any good. Not to use the gifts of God is to abuse them. He loses them, who does not make them serviceable to the good of the church. Rest is a crime in one who is called to a laborious life; and we cannot live to ourselves alone, when we belong to the church.” Or ponder Hitchcock: “Anything not used is already the same as lost.”

Our master, like the one in this parable, requires a return on what we were given. Lynch preached: “Truth is corn, and thou wilt not be asked for the corn first given thee, but for sheaves.”

vv.24-26

The new king's attendants make an odd protest when he orders the mina taken from the third servant and given to the first: "Master,' they said, 'he already has ten!" Why risk angering the new king with backtalk? And, like the landowner of Matthew 20, does the king not have the right to do as he pleases with what is his?

The attendants' response, however, typifies the human tendency to forget that what has been entrusted to us is not actually ours. Even the newly appointed king, left in the position long enough, might begin to think he reigns over his own domain, rather than the fact that he rules only at the pleasure of the emperor. Archelaus would be rudely awakened to that fact when the second delegation of Jews succeeded in getting him deposed and banished to Gaul (comment on v.14).

Yet, like us, the attendants must have been shocked and puzzled when the king replied, "Everyone who has will be given more; but the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." How can you take anything away from someone who has nothing? Perhaps we gain a bit of insight by looking back to a similar saying in Luke 8:18 — "Whoever has will be given more, but whoever does not have, *even what he thinks he has* will be taken away from him." (italics added)

If the master had been gone so long that the slave began to doubt he would return, perhaps he began to think the mina belonged to him. In the same way, as the day of Jesus' return from his Father's presence seemed (and seems) to be delayed longer and longer, disciples might have begun to think the gift he had given each of them (Ephesians 4:7) was in fact theirs and that the Kingdom growth a Spirit-empowered gift accomplished was in fact their own.

In truth, as Robinson observes, what had been taken away from the third servant "was not his profit, but his capital." Jesus wanted his disciples to know that, regardless of the risks they took and the costs they endured, they were but stewards of the gifts that eventually would drive the explosive expansion of the Kingdom.

v.27

“Slay them in front of me.” Those who heard Jesus speak these words would not have been as shocked by them as we are. Ellicott notes that tyrant kings of the day often executed their opponents and, in fact, Archelaus had done precisely that upon his return from Rome.

Perhaps, however, the hearers would have been deeply shaken if they had understood the meaning of the parable. Ellicott goes on to observe that the execution of the king’s enemies represents “the ultimate victory of the Christ over the unbelieving and rebellious.”

The unbelieving and rebellious. Let us understand that includes the disobedient – and we all should be taken aback at the thought that refusal to obey our master’s command to multiply puts us squarely in those circles. There is no practical difference between the servant who refused to the master’s command to earn (vv.20-25) and the people who rejected their lord’s kingship (vv.14,27).

Beecher declares: “One may be free from all vices and from great sins, and yet break God's whole law. That law is love. Many say to themselves, ‘What wrong do I do?’ The question is, What right do you do? An empty grape-vine might say, ‘Why, what harm do I do?’ Yes, but what clusters do you produce? Vitality should be fruitful.”

And, as Jesus warned, branches that do not bear fruit are cut off and gathered to be thrown into the fire. (John 15:6)

Matthew’s account of a similar story – the Parable of the Talents – lies wedged between a story about foolish virgins who were unprepared when the bridegroom finally arrived (25:1-13) and one about obedient sheep and disobedient goats (25:31-46). We must not miss the terrifying consequences in each of those:

- (1) Members of the wedding party were locked out of the celebration banquet,
- (2) The worthless servant was thrown into outer darkness,
- (3) Hard-hearted goats were banished into eternal punishment, in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

The king/subjects theme of Jesus' parable certainly downplays expectations of an imminent kingdom. Yet it does much more than that. The parable draws on then-recent events to draw out a crucial truth about slaves who don't submit to lordship.

Everyone who thinks themselves saved should ponder which slave represents their service to King Jesus. We should begin by acknowledging that Christ has entrusted to each one of us a spiritual mina. (Ephesians 4:7) We should further consider our faithfulness to the departing Lord's command: "Make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Slaves of Christ must not hide their mina in a hankie any more than an oil lamp should be covered by a basket. (Matthew 5:14-16) The question each must answer is "Am I doing with my mina what I was commanded to do?"

Scott offers this advice: "Do not wait for some great opportunity. The born artist makes his first pictures with a bit of chalk or burnt stick."

Thompson warns: "Neglected opportunities never return. You cannot put your hand into yesterday to do what was then neglected, or sow the seeds of future harvests."

Hitchcock observes: "There is no such thing as standing still. There is no such thing as merely holding one's own. ... Only the conqueror is unconquered."

The only danger a slave of Christ faces is the consequence of not obediently using what his Lord has given him and taking the risks necessary to build the Kingdom.

On the other hand, reward beyond comprehension awaits faithful risk-takers – even those who take smaller risks than they could.

1 <https://www.sermonaudio.com/playpopup.asp?SID=31412110022030>