

“PUT THIS MONEY TO WORK” UNTIL JESUS RETURNS

Luke 19:11-27

Key Verse: 19:13

“So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’”

Today’s passage, the parable of the ten minas, is similar to the parable of the bags of gold, or talents in Matthew’s gospel (Mt 25:14-30). The main point of both parables is the same: Jesus will return as King and Judge and all people will be accountable to him. The parable in Matthew is the second of three successive ones which culminate in Jesus’ glorious return as King. The parable in Luke flows out of the purpose of coming: to seek and to save the lost, and it is succeeded by Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as King. As a point of contrast, Luke focuses more on Jesus’ kingship, and Matthew Jesus’ relationship with his servants. Through this parable, Jesus corrects his followers’ false expectation that the kingdom will come at once so they may understand what he will do in Jerusalem. He teaches that they will need to wait for his kingdom, and instructs them what to do until he comes.

These days, people are quite concerned about the outcome of the presidential election. What kind of president do we have? We hope and pray that he may be compassionate toward marginalized people and promote Christian values which create a good spiritual environment. We pray for America to be a shepherd nation and a blessing to the world. Though presidents come and go, Jesus remains as our Eternal King and Sovereign Ruler; his kingdom will never end (1:33). Jesus will come again in glory as Judge, and we will all stand before him. So, we should be seriously concerned about Jesus, our King. Let’s learn in today’s passage what kind of king Jesus is, and how we can prepare for his coming.

First, Jesus directs, “Put this money to work” (11-13). This passage is a continuation of the previous event. Verse 11 says, **“While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was on his way to Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”** People had just heard Jesus’ pronouncement of

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salvation upon Zacchaeus (9-10). Zacchaeus’ change must have been shocking to everybody. He seemed to be the last person to repent and become compassionate toward the poor. But he did. It was the fruit of Jesus’ amazing grace. Jesus had said, **“Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today”** (5). Jesus’ warm welcome to this terrible sinner had transforming power. Zacchaeus repented so sincerely, and seemed to give away everything he had. When people saw Zacchaeus’ change, right after Jesus gave sight to a blind beggar, they were shocked. Memories of all that Jesus had said and done began to fill their minds. They concluded that the kingdom of God would appear at once as Jesus was entering Jerusalem. They might have expected that Roman rulers would lose power to oppress people, and would uphold true justice and righteousness. Hypocritical, burdensome religious leaders would repent their legalism and be filled with grace and compassion. All sick, diseased and demon-possessed people would be fully healed and restored and enjoy true freedom. All evil people would become holy and generous saints. How wonderful are these expectations!

The problem is that they wanted to see them **“at once.”** They wanted everything to be done magically by Jesus as they watched and received the benefits. They avoided the hard reality of the world and the necessity of suffering. They were like those who want to get straight A’s without studying hard, get rich without working hard and taking risks, have a fruitful ministry without caring for people one by one, or become a great leader without painful discipline. The disciples should have listened to Jesus’ repeated words about going up to Jerusalem and how he would suffer, die and rise again. But they were spiritually deaf and blind because they had their own sinful desire in their hearts. This is what made them ignore the way of the cross deliberately. It was not easy for Jesus to bear with them, but he was patient and taught them a parable to help them confront reality and discover what they should do to live a fruitful life.

Jesus began his parable: **“A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return”** (12). Here “the man of noble birth” refers to Jesus. Going to a distant country explains his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, from where he

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now reigns as King. And his return indicates he will come again to Judge. Before going to the distant country, the man of noble birth called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. **“Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back”** (13). Here **“his servants”** can be identified with Jesus’ disciples, not just the Twelve, but all who follow him. A mina was about three months’ wages for a working man. It was a capital investment intended to produce a profit in business. We can see a similar thing today on the television show “Shark Tank.” In that show, several rich investors listen to creative people’s business ideas, and decide if and how much to invest in them. The difference is that in this parable the mina was simply given to all servants equally without evaluation. Obviously, the master did not intend that the servants squander their mina on selfish indulgences. Jesus said, **“Put this money to work, until I come back.”** Jesus sounds like an American capitalist. Indeed, capitalism finds its basis in Christianity and the Protestant work ethic. Benjamin Franklin famously said, “Time is money,” and claimed that God revealed to him the usefulness of virtue.¹ Max Weber² explains this in his book, “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.” On the basis of their Christian faith, Protestants lived pure and humble lives, worked hard, and saved money. This created the environment in which capitalism could thrive. The problem is that over time, Christian virtue was replaced by greed, and capitalism became a means of exploitation. We need to pray for this nation to restore genuine Christian virtue, based on the motto, “In God we trust.” Then our economy will prosper greatly. Jesus’ words, **“Put this money to work,”** are not just about making money, but teach us how to become good stewards. They give life direction, purpose and meaning while we are living on earth.

Jesus used the words **“money”** and **“mina”** interchangeably. Then to what could a mina refer? First of all, it refers to one’s life. Each person has life endowed by God. As a being created in God’s image, each person has great potential to produce amazing and abundant fruit. God blessed mankind, saying, **“Be fruitful and increase in number...”** (Gen 1:28a). In the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that we can bear fruit—a hundred times more than

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Protestant_Ethic_and_the_Spirit_of_Capitalism

² A German sociologist, economist and politician (1864-1920).

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was sown (Lk 8:8). In John 12:24, Jesus explained how we can bear much fruit: **“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”** In order to bear much fruit we need to invest our time and energy with a life-giving spirit. Without investment, nothing happens. Investment requires taking a risk. But in God we are guaranteed an amazing return. Jesus promised, **“Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it”** (Lk 9:24). For example, when Moses grew up, he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He invested his life in God and in his kingdom. Then God used him as the pillar of his redemption history, and gave him eternal glory, as we see through the transfiguration. Jesus invested his life and shed his blood for sinners and became our Savior King. Through his sacrifice, innumerable men and women have received salvation and entered heavenly glory.

If a mina is one’s life, it includes his or her blend of talents and gifts. Some people are talented writers, others thinkers, others speakers, and still others listeners. Usually good listeners have many friends and can be good shepherds. Some people are talented in music, others in math, and others in social studies. To Christians in the church, there are also spiritual gifts, such as teaching, speaking, serving, helping, encouraging, and healing (1Co 12:28; 1Pe 4:11). These gifts are given by Christ to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up (Eph 4:11-12). Each person is unique, just as each one has a unique fingerprint. Their exercise of talents and gifts will also be unique. It is foolish to compare one’s talents or gifts with others. Rather, we should put our mina to work for Jesus. So many practice this teaching, including Jerry Robinson, Deborah Lim, Sarah Chung. Jesus said, **“Put this money to work, until I come back.”** Are we doing this?

Second, Jesus calls his servants to account when he returns (14-27). In the parable, disgruntled subjects sent a delegation after the man, saying, **“We don’t want this man to be our king.”** This refers primarily to the religious leaders, and more broadly, to anyone who does not accept Jesus as King. Why

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did they not accept Jesus? They wanted a glorious king who would give them victory and power without any suffering. But Jesus was very clear that he must suffer and die. It was because of our sins. We must suffer and die and go to eternal condemnation due to our sins. But Jesus, out of his amazing love, sacrificed himself as a ransom for us so that we may be saved from our sins and have eternal life. Jesus wanted them to know that he would surely become the King. But he would not be a political, military king who rules harshly, while his cronies enjoy their privileges; Jesus became the Savior King who is very humble, gentle and sacrificial. Jesus is the Friend and Savior of all kinds of people, especially the marginalized.

Whether his subjects liked it or not, Jesus was made King and returned home. This refers to his coming again. The first time Jesus came, it was to save us from our sins as a humble Savior. However, the second time, Jesus will come in glory and power as King and Judge. At that time we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Each of us will receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Co 5:10). Jesus will evaluate each person’s entire life. This evaluation surely will come for each of us. There will be no opportunity to escape, no hiding place, and no postponement. What will happen then?

In his parable, Jesus sent for his servants to find out what they had gained with his money. The first one came with a big smile and joyfully reported, **“Sir, your mina has earned ten more”** (16). It was a 1000% return on investment! The King was greatly pleased and responded, **“Well done, my good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities”** (17). The King complimented the servants’ work, **“Well done,”** as well as his character, **“my good servant.”** How wonderful it is to receive such a compliment from the King! Paul mentions that for those who fight the good fight and finish the race, there is in store the crown of righteousness (2Ti 4:8). John mentions that the faithful will receive a crown of victory (Rev 2:10). Furthermore, the King’s reward was to take charge of ten cities. This is honor and authority, far beyond what we can imagine. The second servant came and said, **“Sir, your mina has earned five more”** (18). It was a 500% profit. The King didn’t rebuke him for bringing less than the

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first servant. Rather, he said, **“You take charge of five cities”** (19). This implies that he received recognition like the first servant, as well as honor and authority, in proportion to what he had earned.

The first two servants made a great profit and received great reward. How could they do that? Based on Jesus’ words, they were trustworthy with something small. This implies that they valued their master’s trust very highly. This inspired them to do their best, and gave them courage and a spirit of adventure. They gave their whole heart in putting their mina to work. They did not overlook any opportunity or the smallest detail in improving their profitability. This kind of attitude springs from a genuine recognition of the king’s sovereignty. It also comes from loving obedience, not just a sense of obligation. Jesus said, **“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching”** (Jn 14:23a). When we recognize God’s sovereignty, and remember Jesus’ grace, we can practice this kind of loving obedience. To make a profit is not easy, especially in a hostile environment filled with enemies of the gospel. There are many hardships and obstacles that require perseverance. If we want to help one person grow as Jesus’ disciple, we must overcome many challenges. Sometimes we feel like giving up, and that our labor has been in vain. But this is not true. Labor in the Lord is never in vain (1Co 15:58). When we do not give up in doing good, at the proper time, God enables us to reap a harvest (Gal 6:9). So don’t give up!

Another servant came and said, **“Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow”** (20-21). What was his problem? He assumed that he knew his master, but did not have a love relationship with him. He had a very negative view of his master and was afraid of him. Fear paralyzed his mind and heart and made him powerless to do anything. Fear made him timid and petty. His master did not say, “I am so sorry. You need some sick days and some counseling.” Rather, he rebuked him, **“I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant!”** This wickedness refers to his evil attitude toward his master. He didn’t really expect his master to come back as King. He was not at all concerned about the King’s business. So he neglected to do anything, even to

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put the mina in the bank to draw interest (22-23). Then the master said to those standing by, **“Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas”** (24). When the other servants showed their surprise, he explained, **“I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away”** (25-26). This is the principle of the gospel. It may seem unfair, but it is truly fair. Jesus is very clear about reward and punishment. In this servant’s case, the taking away of his mina is painful but not fatal. He reminds us of the servants Paul describes, whose work is burned up in the fire but they themselves escape the flames (1Co 3:12-14).

What happens to enemies who did not want Jesus to be King? Jesus said, **“...bring them here and kill them in front of me”** (27). To accept Jesus as king or not is a matter of life and death. This Jesus, who comes again as King, gave each of us a mina and said, **“Put this money to work, until I come back.”** Let’s take this word to heart and be good stewards of what he has given. Then we can hear him say, **“Well done, my good servants! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.”**