

The Ten Minas

Date: 21 March 2021

Location: St George's Battery Point

Series: Stories along the Way (Parables in Luke)

Texts: Luke 19:11-27; Psalm 2; 1 Peter 4:1-11

We all inherit different skills and habits from our parents. My Grandad was a canny investor, but that trait didn't get passed on to me. There's lots of great things I learned from my parents, but managing investments wasn't one of them. When my Grandad died he left me a sum of money. I have to say that I always squirm a little reading this parable of the Ten Minas in Luke 19 and the parallel in Matthew 25. I'm not quite as bad as the third servant. That money earns interest, but I could do more with it.

On the surface it looks like this parable is about putting our money to good use. That is certainly an application of Jesus' parable, but I want to suggest that there is lots more going on here than just that. You can judge at the end of this sermon whether I've just been trying to wriggle out of doing a better job with my investment. There are 3 sets of characters in the parable - the King, the Enemies of the king, and the servants. To help us understand what Jesus is saying, let's look at each in turn. If you like, we're going to work from the edges of the parable and make our way to the centre.

The King - he is coming back

The first character we meet in the parable is the king. Read with me verse 12.

'A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.

Luke tells us the setting for this story in verse 11. Jesus is nearing the end of journey from Galilee. He has just visited the tax collector Zacchaeus' house in Jericho. That encounter transformed Zacchaeus from greed to abundant generosity. Now the next stop is Jesus' final destination - Jerusalem.

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.

Luke tells us that Jesus told this parable to address people's expectations about the kingdom of God. And so the story is about a king. Who does the king in the story represent? Our first introduction to a king in Luke's gospel comes in the angel Gabriel's words to Mary: *You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ... The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.*¹

¹ Luke 1:31-33

Immediately following this parable Jesus enters Jerusalem, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy of God's king coming, riding on a donkey.²

The king then is Jesus. He is the noble man who goes to a distant country to have himself appointed king. He is the heavenly Son who has gone to a far country to be crowned with thorns.

Having gone away to be crowned, the king will return. What does Jesus' mean by this? This return can be taken in two ways. For the immediate audience, who heard this story from Jesus' lips, this return is what is about to happen, Jesus' coming to Jerusalem as king. For us as readers of the gospel, we're right to see this as his coming again at the end of history. It's what we say in the creed each week - that *he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end*. As we've seen again and again in Jesus' parables, the day of his return in glory is the horizon of lives. That coming day shapes, or at least ought to shape how we live now in the present.

So Jesus is the coming king. In the rest of the parable he focuses on 2 groups of people and their response to the king. So let's take a look at them in turn - the enemies, then the servants.

The enemies of the king - will you welcome or reject the king?

In verse 14 we read:

14 'But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, "We don't want this man to be our king."

What of these characters? The Jewish historian Josephus records that in 40BC Herod the Great travelled to Rome where the Roman senate made him king of the Jews. In 4BC, after Herod died, his son Archelaus went to Rome to be confirmed as king of Judea. He was followed by a delegation of 50 Jews who didn't want him. Augustus gave him the lesser title of ethnarch. But after 10 years of misrule, Archelaus went again to Rome, followed by another delegation of Jews opposing his rule, this time successfully. How Jesus sets up the parable would have brought these events to mind for his first hearers. Unlike Archelaus, Jesus is not a cruel and wicked ruler, but the true King of the Jews, a king of grace and peace. The question he raises in this last parable before coming to Jerusalem as king is whether his people will reject him as king.

The parable ends on a somber note:

² Zechariah 9:9

27 *But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me.”*

Jesus warns his first hearers of what rejecting him will mean. They will face judgment and the kingdom will be given to others who receive him as king. We'll hear more on that next week in the parable of the tenants.

This strand of Jesus' parable asks us the question: will you welcome or reject him as king?

The Servants - How do you use what God has entrusted to you?

In verse 13 we're introduced to the other set of characters - the 10 servants.

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

This is one of the points where Luke telling of this parable is quite different from Matthew's. There there are 3 servants, given 5, 2 and 1 talents respectively. A talent was 60kg of gold, worth about 20 years wages. Here there are 10 servants, each given one mina. A mina was 100 drachma, or about 4 months wages. It's a small sum of money, and they're instructed to put it to work while their master is away. On his return, the king calls for his servants to find out what they had gained with what he entrusted to them.

The Good Servants

We then hear 3 responses from the servants - 2 good and one bad.

‘The first one came and said, “Sir, your mina has earned ten more.”

17 *“Well done, my good servant!” his master replied. “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.”*

18 *‘The second came and said, “Sir, your mina has earned five more.”*

19 *‘His master answered, “You take charge of five cities.”*

Notice what the servants say - *your mina has earned ten more*. What they have has been given by the master. They have put it to work, but they have been working for him. What they have earned belongs to him.

Then there is the master's response. First there is a hearty commendation. *Well done, my good servant!*

Finally, in the new administration of the returning king, the servants are given more responsibility. *Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.*

In our reading from 1 Peter 4, the apostle tells us that all we have is a gift from God. We are called to be faithful stewards of God's grace, using what he has given us to serve

others. We do not possess anything absolutely, but hold it in trust, to use for God in the service of others. The abilities that God has given us. Our minds. The training we've received. Our money. Our cars. Our devices. Our homes. Our time.

If you follow Christ, you are a servant of the king. He is the true king of this world. This parable reminds us that many reject him as king. This is the context in which the servants of Jesus find themselves. In John's gospel Jesus says, *No servant is greater than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*³ It's in this context, waiting for Jesus to return, in a world that crucified him, that we are called to be faithful to him and to put the gifts he has given us to work.

The wicked servant

But it's also possible to be unfaithful with what has been entrusted to us. Read with me verse 20:

“Then another servant came and said, “Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 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.”

What does it mean that he was afraid of the master? He thinks the master is unfair and steals the fruits of others' labours. If the master will take it away, why should he work for what he can't enjoy? And given his master is a hard man, what happens if he fails? Better to not take the risk. Better to simply return the gift in its packaging. He totally misjudges the master's generosity. His words insult the king and betray his own twisted heart.

The king's response is to leave the servant in his own twisted judgment of the king.

22 ‘His master replied, “I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?”

24 ‘Then he said to those standing by, “Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.”

25 ““Sir,” they said, “he already has ten!”

26 ‘He replied, “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.

³ John 15.20

This is a stark warning for us. Unfaithfulness springs from a false picture of the king. He loves us and abundantly gives us all we need and more. And he calls us to put what we've been given to work. To anxiously hide away what we've been given instead of spending them in the service of God and neighbour is to insult our creator. There is no neutral space here. We are either going forwards or backwards. When Jesus returns, who we really are will be revealed. If we have treated what God has given us as nothing then the day will come when he will take even that away.

In this parable Jesus offers us a grand picture for what we can do, even with the little that God has given us. How can we put the one mina that we've been given to work to produce 10 more? Peter gives the examples of speaking and serving. You could take those two examples the 2 spheres of where we can use our gifts - in proclaiming the gospel, and in serving the common good. Over the past 5 weeks we've heard of people we've sent out to use their gifts to serve God's world. Marc and Joey - using their gifts in computer science and midwifery. Tim and Emma in medicine, community development and discipleship, Andrea as a hospital chaplain, Andy proclaiming the Gospel at UTAS, Andrea training for ministry. I think of Catherine Hamlin, an Australian doctor who dedicated her life to caring for women with childbirth injuries in Ethiopia. Or J.S. Bach, writing exquisite music to the glory of God. Or William Wilberforce, who helped found the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Church Missionary Society and dedicated his political career to abolishing slavery in the British Empire.

It may be in the small things of life - like passing on your faith to your kids and grandkids, giving sacrificially to the work of ministry and care for the poor, praying daily for your family and friends and specific ministries, mentoring someone younger at church. For some leaving a lucrative career to dedicate yourself to Christian ministry. The list is only limited by your imagination. The question is, how are you going to put to work what God has entrusted to you?

Jesus says that we'll be called to account for how we have used what we have been given. But we need not fear that day. He will commend those who have been faithful. What's more, perhaps to our surprise he will also give them more responsibility in his coming kingdom. We are invited to work with him in the new creation and I imagine take delight in the work of our hands.

All of us crave recognition and approval. There's nothing better than to hear praise from someone you love and respect for a job well done. The right word and you can live off

that praise for a year. I've got to remember that with my kids. As many of you know my Mum died last year. She spent her life recording the good news of Jesus in minority languages. She recorded in over 400 languages in 18 countries. She was shy and full of self doubt. Like most of us she never saw all the fruit of her labours. Jesus' words in this parable have given me great comfort and hope because they are a promise for all who would serve him. There is no greater praise that we can receive than to hear Jesus' verdict on our life: *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"* That is my hope and prayer for you too.

