

51. The Parable of the Ten Minas

Luke 19:11-27

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

As we come to the Parable of the Ten Minas, we find Jesus at the house of Zacchaeus where He and His disciples were probably having supper together. Zacchaeus had just issued his statement of how he was going to live his life from that time forward, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8).

After affirming Zacchaeus for his change of heart, Christ now turned His attention to the next day's seventeen-mile steep upward journey from Jericho to Jerusalem. He knew of the excitement and anticipation that His small band of followers felt as they looked forward to what they thought would happen upon Jesus' arrival on the Mount of Olives. Below them, would be the city of Jerusalem, awaiting the arrival of its Messiah and King! The people were about to find out that their expectations were not accurate. The timing was not as they envisioned it, and neither was the reception of the King of Kings as Jesus made His way to Jerusalem.

How different they had pictured His triumphal entry! The timing for His earthly reign was yet to be fulfilled. Instead, Jesus warned them again that He had to go away. He spoke to them of the mission that He had for those He would leave behind. He was calling them to invest their lives in real treasure, a treasure that many pass by without seeing. Only those with a discerning heart can realize the true value of this treasure. Some people will discern the treasure, and be willing to leave all other treasures behind to acquire it. Others may simply pass by and not realize what they have missed until it is too late. What a tragic mistake to miss out on a treasure that is placed before you within your reach!

Let me illustrate how this is possible. I want to tell you a story about a real earthly treasure that some passed up, not seeing the value, thus making the biggest mistake of their lives, ignoring what was right before them. I am talking about one of the biggest diamond mines in South Africa!

The year was 1866; the place was the Cape District of South Africa. Farmer Schalk Van Niekerk came across a group of children playing a game called Five Stones or Jacks. While watching them play, he noticed that one of the pebbles they were playing with was quite different from the rest. His curiosity was aroused. He offered money for it to the wife of the owner of the land the children were playing on. She laughed, saying, "Who would want to pay money for a pebble, there are lots of them lying around." Van Niekerk did nothing about the stone until the following year when he entrusted the stone to a passing trader, John O'Reilly.

In Hopetown, O'Reilly began to boast that he had found what he thought was a diamond. He was ridiculed to scorn by other traders while one bet him a dozen beers that it was worth nothing at all. O'Reilly became so disheartened that he thought of throwing the stone in the river. In the next town, Colesberg, he was again ridiculed, but the acting civil commissioner, Lorenzo Boyes, believed it to be a diamond. When he was consulted, the local chemist upped the bet with a new hat, feeling like it was all a good joke.

The stone was then sent to the foremost geologist of the Cape Colony, Doctor William Atherstone. It was placed in an ordinary envelope, with a covering letter; such was the serious doubt that it was a diamond. Atherstone did not notice that the stone fell out when he opened the envelope. When he read the letter about the stone, he and his daughter looked frantically, and when found, it looked to be a dull, rounded, apparently water-worn river stone. When glass was cut with the stone, they were convinced. It was a beautiful diamond of just over twenty—one carats worth over 500 English Pounds sterling, a lot of money in 1867. It was shipped to the most famous jewelers in London, Garrards, who confirmed that it was worth over 500 pounds.

Widespread unbelief broke out at this point as calls for investment in the area were made. The Illustrated London News refused to publish a picture of it. Garrards, the jewelers, also refused to have anything to do with it, suggesting it was all part of a swindle to get financial investment for the Cape district of South Africa. Sir Roderick Murchison, rated the highest geological authority in Britain, staked his professional reputation that the diamond did not come from South Africa.

It so happened that at that same time, John O'Reilly found another diamond, this time weighing nine carats and worth 200 pounds. Two years after the first find, London's Hatton Garden jewelers sent out mineralogist Professor James Gregory to the Vaal and Orange River region. Gregory said that the whole story of the Cape diamond discoveries was false and that it was a scheme to promote employment and expenditure of capital in the area. He said that any diamonds in the area must have been carried in the gizzards of ostriches from some far-distant region.

That was all forgotten when a magnificent white diamond, The Star of Africa, was found, weighing over eighty-three carats.¹ The greatest investment opportunity had come and gone for many because they were closed minded to the truth of the treasure just waiting to be picked up. People just could not believe that treasure of any magnitude could be just picked up off the ground. Can you imagine how some of those people felt, knowing that they passed up such a life-changing opportunity? They thought it could not be possible, i.e. such riches offering themselves up so easily, and coming from a place that they did not expect such a treasure to be found!

Similar observations could be made regarding Christ and His kingdom. Many of those who had been awaiting the Messiah and those who had been educated in the Scriptures and the prophecies concerning Him were blinded to His arrival on the scene. The Kingdom of God was within their midst, but they did not perceive Him.

How interesting that one such as Zacchaeus, i.e. one who had been despised and thought unworthy of the kingdom, should be one that perceived true riches. He was willing to leave dishonest gain behind to acquire heavenly riches. He would show this by how he would deal with others by making restitution and investing earthly treasure by giving to the poor. Not only that, but also he appeared to be doing it with a heart full of joy. Right after this, Jesus starts to tell them a parable. As with many of Jesus' stories, it has a surprise ending. He knew that soon His disciples would be disheartened and confused. This story was to prepare them for what was to

¹ Nigel Blundell, *The World's Greatest Mistakes*, Hamlyn Publishers.

come, teach them about investing in the heavenly kingdom, and to wait and invest their Master's resources until His return.

The Parable of the Ten Minas

¹¹While 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. ¹²He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.' ¹⁴"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' ¹⁵"He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. ¹⁶"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.' ²⁰"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. ²¹I 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.' 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? ²³Why 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 he has will be taken away. ²⁷But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me" (Luke 19:11-27).

Two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus left heaven to tell us about true riches and how to invest our lives so that many may find the riches of God. Heaven's great treasure is not a diamond and cannot be compared to any earthly treasure. Heaven's treasure is a person, viz. the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have Him at the center of your life, you have heaven's riches, and He Himself will make you an eternally blessed person (2 Corinthians 4:7). Many people fail to see the value in receiving Heaven's treasure just as many people had passed by the children day by day while they were playing with diamonds, thinking nothing of it. Their eyes were not opened to that which would have brought them great riches. Let us not make the mistake of doing the same and be unaware of the treasure of Christ within us and the opportunities for eternal investment that are all around us: "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles **the glorious riches** of this mystery, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (Colossians 1:27). Christ is the true treasure, and the Scriptures bear witness of this fact. The Scriptures themselves are not the treasure. The Bible is the map and directions to the real treasure, i.e. the person of Christ.

The passage before us today is important because it is the last passage of teaching before Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to give His life as a sacrificial offering. The expectation was high among all the people. Prophetic writings had revealed that the Messiah would come at the very time of the

Passover in the days ahead (Daniel 9:25). Zechariah, the prophet, had even stated that the Messiah's coming would be from the East of the city of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, the very place Jesus and the disciples were approaching the next day:

³Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. ⁴On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south (Zechariah 14:3-4).

Question 1) What do you imagine were the thoughts and conversation of those with Jesus as they began their walk together from Jericho to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem?

It is interesting that geologists with *The National Geographic Magazine* have told us that there is a fault line that runs through the Mount of Olives just as the prophetic word says. Some of the people traveling with Jesus, if they were aware of the prophecy, may have been fearful as they approached the Mount of Olives, expecting that it may split in two at any time! Certainly, there would have been much expectation and excitement among the party of people that were in Jericho that night. The disciples surely began wondering what their thrones would look like alongside that of Jesus. He had warned them, though, that it would be different than what they thought, telling them plainly that He would be rejected and killed but raised from the dead (Luke 18:31-33). They were slow in understanding this and didn't want to hear it, for they had made up their minds as to what to expect. In their limited understanding, they clung to the thought of an earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6). Although they could not comprehend it then, the kingdom that Jesus was bringing into being was far greater and encompassed more than what they could have dreamed.

The story Jesus told was like a political news story of the time. When King Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., he divided and left his kingdom to his three sons, Herod Antipas, Herod Phillip, and Herod Archelaus. Archelaus got Judea but he wanted to also be called king. However, this title could only come from Caesar Augustus in Rome. Before setting out to ask Caesar for the title of king, he quelled sedition by the Jews with terrible cruelty, massacring 3000 Jewish people, many who were religious Pharisees. When he got to Rome, he was opposed by his brother Antipas and a delegation of fifty Jews and Samaritans from Israel, plus 8000 Jews that were living in Rome. Caesar gave Archelaus the title of Ethnarch,² the title for a governor of a province, promising to make him king, should he prove worthy of the title. Suffice it to say, he never became king.³

The story Jesus told would have got the ear of his listeners right away. The Lord tells of a nobleman taking a trip to a far country who calls his ten servants to himself and gives them each a mina, an amount equal to three month's wages, with which to do business until he returned. Jesus was preparing them for His going to the Father and being away from them physically, but He was telling them that the business of the kingdom must continue after He has left. His disciples are to understand that they would be entrusted with "His business," and He would soon be leaving them in charge. Jesus' story was like the recent news story about Archelaus in many

² Josephus, *Ant.* 17.206-23, 299-314; cf. Luke 19:14).

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Archelaus

respects, although some parts of it Jesus changed to allude to Himself. Some of the similarities that can be noted are as follows:

- 1.) Jesus was born of noble birth in that He was divinely conceived (Luke 19:12 and Luke 1:31-33).
- 2.) After Jesus' death and resurrection, He ascended to heaven for His appointed kingship (Luke 19:12 and Luke 24:50-51, and Acts 1: 9-12).
- 3.) After an interval, Jesus will return to make visible that kingship (Luke 19:12, and Luke 21: 27 and again Acts 1: 9-12.)

There were also some differences in the story. Jesus did depart to a far-off land (Heaven) to receive the Kingdom; whereas, Archelaus was never made king. Although there was opposition to the rule of Christ as with Archelaus ("We have no king but Caesar," John 19:15), the difference here is that Christ has become King and will return to His subjects, thus making the Kingship visible with rewards for his faithful servants.

The nobleman's fellow citizens, the ones over whom he was to rule, disliked him and sent a delegation to the authority in the land, Pontius Pilate, to persuade the ruler of the distant country not to authorize Christ to rule over them, rather, to crucify Him. The story matches Jesus' experience of being rejected as Israel's king (Matt. 22:6 and Acts 17:7).

What are We to be Doing in the Meantime?

The purpose of the parable is about what should go on in the meantime, i.e. what His servants are to be doing while King Jesus is away. Before he leaves, the nobleman gives ten of his servants one mina each.

This Parable of the Ten Minas seems to be like the Parable of the Talents, but the amounts given to the servants is different. In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), one is given five talents, another two, and another one. A talent was also a unit of currency. When we think of talents today, what comes to mind are abilities and giftedness to skillfully accomplish certain tasks, but in New Testament times, a talent was a very valuable unit of currency, usually a weight of gold or silver. We can see these talents as representing our own gifts, abilities, knowledge, and finances, in short, our total resources. Some are given more talents and abilities than others and are accountable to God for what they have received from Him. The Parable of the Ten Minas is spoken at a different time and with a different application in mind. Each of the ten were given the same amount, just one mina each.

Question 2) What do you think the equal amount of a mina given to each of the servants represents?

We cannot be dogmatic about it, but the one mina given to all of us could represent the responsibility we have each been given, and what we all have in an equal amount, i.e. the stewardship of the message of the Gospel.

I am not ashamed of the *gospel*, because *it is the power of God* for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Romans 1:16).

The Gospel is the most powerful thing on planet Earth. The message of God's love, mercy, and grace toward to all mankind is a sacred trust that rests on all that believe.

⁴On the contrary, we speak as men *approved* by God to be *entrusted with the gospel*. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts (1 Thessalonians 2:4 Emphasis mine).

In the verse above, the word *approved* is the Greek word *dokimazo*. It means to test something as to whether it was accounted worthy or approved. Paul calls the Gospel a sacred trust that has been given to all of us. If the salvation of men depends on the good news reaching all over the earth to all men, and it does, then we must think through pragmatic ways to get the good news out by any means possible. We must carry the sacred trust of the Gospel to others. The tests of God are designed by God to refine our character so that we can be trusted truth-bearers.

Question 3) If the Gospel is represented by the mina given to each of the ten servants, what is Jesus meaning when He says, "Put this money to work until I come back?" (v. 13).

Notice that none of the servants were left out, each was given a trusted amount to invest. All Christians have a responsibility to spread the Gospel in any way they can. We cannot keep it to ourselves. The Greek word that is translated by the phrase "put this money to work" (NIV) or "occupy" (KJV) is *pragmateuomai*. We get the word English word *pragmatic* from this Greek word. It literally means to think realistically and act sensibly, to "turn something over," to make a legitimate gain, to do business, to invest or trade with a view to bringing a return on the investment.

What is the Lord saying here? When we believe the Gospel and receive the grace of Christ into our lives, it is our joy and our obligation to do what we can to share with others (Romans 1:14). We are pragmatically to think through how we can get the best return for our Master with the resources He has given us. We are to sit down and think through pragmatic ways to invest our time, energy, and money in promoting the Kingdom of heaven wherever we can. When our Master returns, there will be an accounting for how we have invested our lives in this world. "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.' " ¹²So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (Romans 14:10b-12).

The Judgment Seat of Rewards

We should not get nervous as believers when we read that even believers will have to give an account of themselves, for Scripture is very clear that our sin has been judged at the cross of Christ, and we will not come into judgment for our sins (John 5:24). When Scripture talks about God's judgment seat in Romans 14:10, and again in 2 Corinthians 5:9, the Greek word used is *bema*. The word means a raised platform where a Roman magistrate or a ruler would sit and

make decisions. Paul uses the word in his epistles to allude to Greek athletic contests, such as the Isthmian games in Corinth. At the end of each race, those running would come to the bema seat to receive their rewards for running according to the rules. It was at the *bema seat* that the laurel wreath was placed on a person's head as a symbol of victory and accomplishment. There was no death penalty for those that did not apply themselves. They probably received a medal for competing. However, if one is going to run the race, why not invest one's energy into winning in order to hear the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." After all, we are running this race of the Christian life for an eternal crown. Paul wrote, ²⁴**Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.** ²⁵**Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever**" (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

Question 4) If all that was given as seed money was returned at the accounting, what was the purpose in giving it to them?

The first man up to the accounting was full of humility. He didn't say "Look at me and what I did." No, the credit was all given to the Lord. 'Sir, **your mina has earned ten more.**' He readily acknowledges the fact that the mina belonged to the Lord and that the Lord was the One who set up the right conditions for him to invest favorably. He gave the ten minas to the nobleman who became King, and the king gave the mina's back to him, along with a reward of ten cities. So, it was with the second one. He wasn't as energetic or diligent as the first, but again, he saw that it was the King's mina and not his own. He got his mina's given back to him along with five cities.

In verse 24, the third man who wrapped up his mina and kept it in a handkerchief (the Greek word used was the sweat cloth a Roman soldier wore around the back of his neck to soak up sweat) was full of excuses, and he even blamed the nobleman for being a thief, he said, "**You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow**" (v. 21). The fact was that he really didn't care for the nobleman and thought little of His treasure. He didn't see the value of it until the accounting. He didn't really believe that there was ever going to be an accounting, such was his apathy and indifference. He was now disappointed to have his mina taken from him and given to the one who had gained ten. As the third man saw the accounting going on with the others, he now realized that what had been entrusted to his care was given to the servants and much more besides. The one who brought 1000% return on his master's money was given the mina that was laid up in a handkerchief gathering dust.

The master, who now was king, didn't need the money. The increase on the master's investment was kept by each of the two men with a massive reward on the top. The third man is called a wicked servant in verse 22, which intimates that this man really was no believer at all. He just tried to look the part. The one who did nothing had no reward and no investment seed money, either. We are not told of penalties or punishment for his lack of investment as shown in this passage, but I sure don't want to be like him. He was sorry that he did nothing. Some would say that the man who did nothing gives us an example of the type of believer who will get to heaven, but has laid up little treasure in heaven for his "home coming" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). I leave it to you to make up your mind as to whether or not he was a believer, for a true believer will always look for opportunities to invest himself or herself in the kingdom of God:

¹⁹Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

The noble master was not interested with the money itself; he calls it “a very small matter” in verse 17. To a King, what is three month’s wages of a common worker? It was simply a test to see the level of their faithfulness in using what they had been given, i.e. their investment opportunity. He wanted to find out who among his servants loved their master enough to value increasing his kingdom and wealth. He needed to find people who would be faithful in small matters so that he could give them greater responsibility when he returned. The King seemed delighted and full of praise for the one who brought a 1000% return on his investment. He said to him, “Well done, my good servant!” (Verse 17), i.e. the same as the one who had gained five minas with his one.

Question 5) What are your thoughts concerning the comparison of the investments and the rewards? Think of the vast difference between what was invested and the reward given. Discuss.

What would be the combined income of ten cities in America? It seems a vastly different amount to the value of ten minas. The use of a city, perhaps, is one way of showing the disproportionate reward for the energy, time, and money invested by the first two people. I believe that God is showing us that:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9 Emphasis mine)

You may say, “It sure sounds like a lot of work! I would like to live out my days resting in Bermuda or Hawaii. To take charge over ten cities is not a reward that I would like!” I see this reward as a reward of trust. It speaks of closeness and of relationship with the Master. With whom does the CEO of any major company spend time? In any healthy organization, it would be his top executives. In the same way, we will be working and relating close to our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a joy that will be! The idea of a city implies that there will responsibility and authority as we have a share in His ruler ship in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The thought of a city helps us in terms of our understanding. The passage says that our mind cannot conceive of what God has planned for those who love Him. The one who gained tenfold on his investment went at it with all his heart. He didn’t see the result of his investment just as Shalk Van Niekirk and John O’Reilly didn’t see what the uncut diamond would look like. There will be many in that day that will say, “Why didn’t I invest more of myself into that which really matters?” We will see, in retrospect, those things that are truly important in God’s economy. Let’s learn that lesson now while there is still time to apply it! What is important in God’s economy? Look at the life of Jesus for that answer. He spent His life investing in people. We, too, need to invest our time in people, especially in those who are yet without Christ in this world.

Prayer: Father, would You open our eyes to see heavenly treasure. Give us vision to understand what a difference we can make in the lives of others. Show us pragmatic ways to invest our time and resources so that there is a maximum return in lives that are changed by the power of the Gospel. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com