

INTRODUCTION

One of my heroes is Billy Graham. Although he is in his mid 80s, and battling Parkinson’s disease, he is still preaching the gospel. In 1996, he and Ruth were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal for their service to America. After the presentation, Dr. Graham was being interviewed by Diane Sawyer. In his inimitable way of always getting Jesus into his conversation he said, “Ruth and I are humbled by this award. But the only recognition I am looking forward to is when I stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. My greatest reward will be to hear Him say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’”

Perhaps you’ve heard that phrase before. It comes from the parable Jesus told in Luke 19. This is an interesting parable because it’s the only parable Jesus told that was based on an actual historical event. Before we read it, remember the context. Jesus had visited Jericho, healed a blind man, visited with Zacchaeus, and now He was heading toward Jerusalem. Jericho is 1,300 feet below sea level, the lowest city in the world, and Jerusalem in about 2,500 feet above sea level. This 20 mile road was an uphill climb in more ways than one because Jesus knew that within a week He would be arrested, tortured and crucified.

Luke 19:11-27. “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. He said: ‘A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas [KJV “pounds” a mina was 3 months wages] ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ 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.’ ‘The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ “Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ ‘The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ His master answered, ‘you take charge of five cities.’” ‘Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a 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.’ 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? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’ Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’ 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. 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.’”

Studying a parable of Jesus is like peeling an onion. There are several layers of meaning and application. This parable has an extra skin because this event really happened. So, let’s peel the onion and get down to the core of what God is trying to say to us.

I. THE HISTORICAL MEANING

In 4 B.C. Archelaus (son of Herod the Great) traveled to Rome to be crowned ruler of Judea.

Herod the Great wasn't so great. He gave himself that title because he was such a great builder. Herod was the one who directed the magi to go to Bethlehem to worship the newborn king, and then to bring word back to him so he could go worship also. But we know Herod was so jealous he actually wanted to kill the Child. When the magi returned without reporting to him, Herod ordered all the boy babies in that region under the age of two be killed. He was Herod the Great Murderer.

When Herod died, there was confusion over his will (he had written six of them). Both Antipas and Archelaus claimed the throne. So, as in the parable Jesus told, Archelaus traveled to Rome to have Caesar Augustus confirm him as ruler. The Jews were outraged with the prospect of Archelaus because he was as brutal as his father. They sent an official delegation of 50 of the leading Jews to Rome to oppose Archelaus as ruler.

Meanwhile, Archelaus bribed many of his supporters to work as his representatives while he was in Rome. Augustus didn't crown Archelaus, instead he made him a ruler of Judea, and gave Galilee to Herod's son, Antipas, and the area to the east of the Jordan to Herod's other surviving son, Phillip.

Archelaus was so angry that when he returned to Jerusalem, he had thousands of Jews who opposed him put to death. Archelaus is mentioned only once in the Bible. When Joseph and Mary returned to Israel after fleeing to Egypt, Matthew 2:22 says when they heard Archelaus was ruler of Judea, they bypassed the area and went to Galilee. So this is more than a fictional parable. It's based upon something that actually occurred. But let's peel off that layer and go deeper and discover:

II. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING

Jesus used this actual event as the basis to describe what was going to happen spiritually. Two thousand years later, the spiritual meaning of His parable hasn't changed.

1. Jesus is going to return as King!

Verse 11 records many of the Jews thought the Kingdom of God was going to appear at that moment. There were certain aspects of the Kingdom of God Jesus embodied. After all, He was the King. But Jesus told this parable to confirm the full revelation of the literal Kingdom of God would only occur after He had departed and returned.

As Archelaus left Judea and traveled to Rome, Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended back into heaven and just as Archelaus returned to Judea to become the ruler, Jesus will one day return to planet earth. It's more than a song, the King IS coming: You'd better be ready.

This is a time of international crisis: Iraq, North Korea, Osama bin Laden. But friend, our security doesn't lie with the UN security council, and the final battle will *not* be a biological or nuclear attack. It will be when the King comes back at the battle of Armageddon. Our source of strength is not in duct tape and plastic wrap but in our God who has *sealed* us with His Holy Spirit and wrapped us in His arms of love! Hallelujah, the King is coming back! When Jesus came the first time, He was the Lamb of God slain to take away the sin of the world. When He comes again, it will be as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah! He came the first time as the gentle Jesus, meek and mild; when He returns; it will be as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! And as the Bible says, "And He shall reign forever and ever!"

2. He has given gifts to His servants

In the parable, the prospective king gave one mina to ten of his servants and told them to "do business" until he returned. The King James Version says, "occupy until I come." The Greek word is *pragmatia* from which we get our word "pragmatic." A mina is equal to about three months' salary, so multiply what you make in a month, and you'll see this wasn't a small amount. Jesus has gone to heaven, but He has given each one of His servants valuable gifts. He has commanded us to "do business" until He returns;, to be pragmatic in the way we manage His resources.

Don't get this parable confused with the parable of the "talents" found in Matthew 25. There are some similar aspects but the main difference is in Matthew 25 the master gave one servant five talents, another servant two, and the third servant was given one. In this parable, each servant is given the same amount: one mina.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 teaches us that we have all been given different spiritual gifts and abilities. But in this parable, the gifts given are *equal*—one mina. We all have different amounts of money, and spiritual abilities, but what are some of the things all of have been given equally by God? I can think of at least three gifts we've all been given in equal amounts.

(1) Time

I'm not talking about the length of your life, because that varies. But each of us has the same amount of time each day—24 hours. Even though we have the same amount, wouldn't you agree some servants to a better job managing those 24 hours in terms of doing business for God? What about

(2) Truth

As servants of God, we all have the same instruction manual, the truth found in God's Word, the Bible. God hasn't given me any more truth than is available to you.

(3) Opportunities to serve God

All of us have opportunities to serve our Master. Some servants just do a better job of taking advantage of those opportunities. They are the ones who'll be rewarded.

3. We will be judged by how we manage His gifts

In the parable, when the King returned, he required a personal accounting from each of his servants. In the same way, we will all give an account to the King on how well we managed the resources we were given. In Revelation 20, we read about the Great White Throne Judgement in which those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life are cast in the Lake of Fire. That judgement is *not* for Christians, it's for those who reject God's free gift of eternal life.

But as Christians, we *will* be judged. In 2 Corinthians 5:10 we read, "For we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." That phrase "judgement seat" is different from the White Throne Judgement of Revelation 20. The word for "judgement seat" is *bema*. A *bema* was a raised platform from which prizes were awarded to athletes who competed in competition. The judgement of Revelation 20 is a judgement of punishment for the sin of unbelief. Our judgement at the *bema* will be a time when the King passes out rewards for how well we invested the gifts we were given. Now, with that historical and spiritual layer removed, let's get the core of what God is saying to us. Let's consider

III. THE PERSONAL MEANING

In the parable, there were two categories of people: servants and subjects. It's also true in this world there are two kinds of people: the servants of the Master, the Lord Jesus, and subjects who have not surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus.

If you haven't made Jesus the Master of your life, the love of Christ constrains me to warn you that:

1. Those who reject the King's authority will be rejected

It's not pretty, but verse 27 describes what will happen to those who haven't surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus when He returns. In the parable, the King executed them. I pray you won't reject God's free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

In the parable, the servants represent those of us who are followers of Jesus. When the king returned, he found two kinds of servants. There were two faithful servants who leveraged the King's minas to create more value. They were rewarded. Then there was an unfaithful servant who gave his one mina back to the king. Here are two applications:

2. If you fearfully hide God's resources, you risk losing them

In verse 21 the unfaithful servant reported he was afraid of the master, so he hid the money. He was fearful, and his response revealed he really didn't know his master very well. He made assumptions that weren't true. He said, "I knew you were a hard man, and you reap what you don't sow." The other servants didn't say that. They considered the Master to be a fair man who would reward their faithful service.

The Master replied, “I’ll judge you by your own words!” He ended up being a hard man to the servant who thought he was that way. What a lesson! If you think God is some hateful, evil, cosmic tyrant, you’ll expect Him to treat you that way. But if you understand God to be a loving Father, who is full of mercy and forgiveness, that’s how you will expect Him to treat you. And according to your faith, it will be so!

The unfaithful servant is a picture of a Christian who is headed for heaven, but because of fear, or a faulty understanding of God, they never really get involved in doing business for God. When asked to sing in the choir, or teach children, or go on a mission trip, their response is usually, “I’m *afraid* I wouldn’t be very good at doing that.” They are the spectator Christians. And when they stand before the Lord they expect He’ll say, “That’s okay, I know you were too timid and fearful to really do business for me—don’t worry about it.” No, instead Jesus will say, “You are a wicked servant!” Look at all the *time* I gave you; look at the *truth* that was available to you; look at all the *opportunities* you had! Wasted!”

Now, you can’t lose your salvation. But you can lose the joy of your salvation; you can use your usefulness; you can lose your reward. When you stand before the Lord, He will examine your works. Our management will be tested in the fire of his evaluation. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 says, “The fire will test the *quality* of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

Some unfaithful servants will be like a man who wakes up and his house is on fire and he rushes out with only a sheet wrapped around him. All his possessions are lost but he is saved. What a sad experience it will be for unfaithful servants at that time.

The unfaithful servant wasn’t rewarded. Instead the Master took the mina away from him and gave it to the one who had ten. The witnesses, cried out, “that’s not fair!” Then Jesus stated a principle in verse 26 that is the basis for the title of this message. He said, “Everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has [or literally “does”] nothing, even what he has will be taken.” He was saying, “Use It or Lose It!” It may sound unfair to you, but that principle is woven into our universe. For instance, it’s true of your muscles. Use them or lose them! If you lie in a hospital bed for a week without exercise, you’ll lose your strength. Atrophy occurs when muscles aren’t used. That’s why physical therapy, exercise, and rehabilitation are so important after you have been hospitalized.

It’s true of your mind as well—use it or lose it! There was an article last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) about how mental stimulation can keep your mind sharp and in some cases prevent Alzheimer’s disease. Here’s a summary of the article appearing in the February 13, 2002 edition of JAMA:

“The study was conducted by scientists at the Rush Alzheimer’s Disease Center at St. Luke’s Medical Center in Chicago. They found that frequent participation in cognitively stimulating activities by senior citizens is associated with a reduced risk of AD. The research examined groups of aging people from several areas around the nation and

looked at activities like reading books, newspapers or magazines, engaging in crossword puzzles, or card games, and going to museums. They found that on a scale measuring cognitive activity—with higher scores indicating more frequent activity—a one point increase in cognitive activity represented a 33% reduction in the risk of AD."

It's true of your muscles and your mind. It's also a spiritual truth. If you don't *use* God's resources you may *lose* them. If you aren't actively doing business for God, you may lose the ability or the desire to do business for God. Are you investing time for God? Are you obeying the truth He has given you? Are you taking advantage of those opportunities to serve Him? But this parable is not about losing it—but about using it! Here's the glorious truth Jesus is trying to communicate to each of us today:

3. If you faithfully invest God's resources, you'll receive much more!

The first and second servants were spiritual entrepreneurs. They got busy and invested their mina doing business for their master. They started with the same amount as the unfaithful servant—they just did something with their mina, while he hid his.

Remember these are resources like Time, Truth, and Opportunities. Have you been reluctant to do business for God because you think you don't have enough time? Do you need more time? Here's what you do. Start using the time you have to do business for God. Soon you'll find you have more time. You won't get 25 hours a day, or eight days a week, it will just seem like you *have* more time! If you don't believe it, try this. Starting tomorrow, get up 30 minutes earlier and give that time to God in prayer and personal Bible Study. If you do that regularly, you'll find you seem to have more time instead of less time.

When you are exposed to truth in God's word, you can either act on it and obey it, or you can ignore it. If you don't act on it (use it) you will lose it. You won't lose the Bible, but you'll lose the blessing that comes from obeying the truth. You can't take God's truth and put in your pocket and save it for a rainy day. Maybe you've come up against a truth in the Word of God and you said, "I know that's in the Bible, but I'm not sure I want to obey it." At that point, you will start going backward in your spiritual growth. But if you *obey* it, you'll move forward and you'll discover more and more truth that was there all along.

What about opportunities to serve God? Once an opportunity passes, it's gone forever. If you don't use it you lose it. These faithful servants didn't play it safe. They risked their lives in doing business for the Master. God honors that kind of bold faith. When you risk it all on serving God, even though you may be afraid, you'll find that God gives you more and more opportunities!

There's a young man in Ohio who is living proof of this parable. His name is Jake Porter. Jake has shown us that *anybody* can take what they've been given and make something out of it. Jake was told he couldn't play football, but he didn't offer excuses; he just played ball. Jake is retarded, yet he never missed a day of football practice. He never played a single down. But on the last game of the season, his team was losing 42-0. His coach put Jake in so he could take a knee as the game ended. The opposing coach insisted that they let Jake score a touchdown. So, in an unlikely scene, they handed Jake the ball and both teams urged him on to the end zone. Jake

thought he had won the game ... and in many ways he had. Jake is a great example of someone who doesn't offer excuses, he just does the best with what he has.

CONCLUSION

Life is all about taking the opportunities God gives us and going for it! There were ten servants in the parable who were each given a mina. Only three reported: Where are the other seven? *We* are the other servants, and the end of the story won't be written until we stand before the Lord and He judges us. One day you and I will stand before Jesus and He'll ask us, "What did you do with all that time I gave you?" "What did you do with all that truth?" "What did you do with those opportunities?"

God has given each of us an equal amount—one life. What are you doing with yours? If you give your life away doing business for God; you'll get more life in return. In Luke 6:38 Jesus said, "Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing." (*The Message*) That is, if you will give away your life as a servant of Jesus, doing His business, you'll receive *more life* in return. Jesus isn't talking about living longer; He's talking about living better. Because not only can God add years to your life, He can add life to your years!

God is looking for a few good spiritual entrepreneurs who are willing to risk their lives doing His business. Will you be one? If you will, one day you'll hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes