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Getting Down to Business

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

How many of you are excited about Easter? I love Easter! I love it because it happens towards the start of Spring and everything seems so bright and colorful. I love Easter at CPC. It's one of the only times in the year where the whole church is together at the same time. You see people you haven't seen for years! "Hey, good to see you! You still come to church here? I haven't seen you for years." So that's fun! And it's fun to have a lot of people here from the community. We get a ton of people who come to church once a year on Easter Sunday, and I'm glad they do. If I could get them there for Christmas, too, I would. So I'm excited. We have some great things planned this year. The worship will be great. A couple from our church is going to give a powerful FaithStory. I'm excited about my sermon. And then we have this great baptism where we dunk a bunch of people in the water and celebrate how God has transformed their lives. The whole morning will be great. We still have two weeks until Easter, but as you can tell, I'm excited!

In the Gospel of Luke, we've followed Jesus as he's been on his way to Jerusalem. It's been a long journey that started back in chapter 9. But now we're in chapter 19 and the disciples are very excited because Jesus is in Jericho, just a few miles outside of Jerusalem. Soon he'll be in Bethany which is right near the Mount of Olives. Then he'll enter into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and what we call Holy Week will begin. You'd think the disciples would be dreading all of this because of what Jesus told them would happen in Jerusalem, but none of that had really registered yet. They're still thinking that this would be his coming out party. Jesus would finally reveal himself as the powerful Messiah and defeat all of Israel's enemies and take his rightful place on the throne of his father David. Look at what Luke says in v. 11. **"While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."**

You see, they're excited about Jerusalem because they didn't understand that before Easter Sunday there had to be Good Friday. They had no concept of a suffering Messiah-King. Not only that, before the kingdom appeared in full, there would be a long delay where it seemed that the King was absent. So Jesus tells them a parable to correct their thinking on all of this and to teach them and future generations about what to do while we wait for him to come and set up his

kingdom. This is important for us because we're still living in that delay. No one likes to wait, but in this parable Jesus tells us what to do while we wait.

I. The Parable of the Ten Minas

A. The king departs: He starts out by introducing the main characters.

"So He said, 'A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us'''" (vv. 12-14).

Perhaps you can see that this story is similar but different than another story Jesus told, called the parable of the talents, recorded in Mt. 25. In that parable, different amounts of money were passed out to three different servants. Here the same amount of money, one mina, is passed out to ten servants. Also, Matthew's parable says nothing about these citizens who hated him. So this is a similar but different story.

Here we have a man of noble birth who goes to a different country to receive a kingdom and then return. That sounds kind of weird to us, but it was actually quite familiar to that day. Actually, this story was ripped from the headlines. The present Palestinian ruler was a man named Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great. When he inherited half of his father's kingdom, the Romans, who occupied Palestine, didn't allow him to be called King like his father, but he coveted that title. So in 4 B.C. he traveled to Rome to ask Caesar to name him King. But the people of Palestine hated this guy because he was a ruthless tyrant. So they sent a delegation of 50 people all the way to Rome to oppose him before Caesar. Caesar decided to let him rule, but still not to call him King.

Jesus uses that example of a wanna-be king to talk about himself, the true king. And he makes it clear that he'll not usher in his kingdom immediately when he's in Jerusalem, but rather there will be a delay. He'll be absent for awhile. That's where we are today. There IS a real sense in which Jesus left to receive his kingdom. That's what the events of the cross, resurrection and ascension are all about. Jesus went to his Father to receive what was rightfully his.

So this nobleman plans to go away. But before he leaves, he calls ten of his servants and gives them each a mina, which was the equivalent of about three months wages. It's not an overwhelming amount of money, but it's enough to work with. And that's what he tells them to do: "Put it to work. Do business with this until I come back."

Jesus has called us to himself and he's entrusted us with some of his resources. Every Christian has a place right here in this story. You are there right along side of Billy Graham and Mother Teresa and the Apostle Paul! Every Christian receives exactly the same amount and the same command to do business with it. Yes, we're all different and we all have different gifts and talents. But THIS parable tells us that we can't talk ourselves into doing nothing by saying, "Well, what can I do? What do I have to offer? I leave all of that ministry stuff to the other guys." The issue in this story is not so much the amount, but rather what you do with it. We're all different, yes, but in a sense we all have the opportunity to use what we have. We all have talents and skills. We all have financial resources. We all have this thing called time. We all have the Gospel and the Scriptures. We all have relationships. The same blood that was shed for Paul and Luther and Billy Graham was shed for you. The question is not what you have or even how much you have, but what you do with what you have.

By the way, why do you think he does that? Why does he give us work to do? Well, when I work for someone, then I also think about him. It's automatic. When Jesus gives me something and tells me to put it to work, then I'm going to want to stay in contact with him as I do that work. My work is preaching. That's what he's given me to do. And I find that preaching keeps me in touch with the Lord; it keeps me dependent on him. Sometimes I wonder if I would even have a prayer life if I didn't have to preach. Sometimes I'm embarrassed about that. But maybe I shouldn't be. Maybe that's why he gives us stuff to do. So we think about him. So we don't forget him.

Now that's one group, but it's important to see that there are two groups in this parable. There are also the citizens who hated him and don't want him to reign. We know that there were two groups of people hanging around Jesus at this time, just as there are two groups here today. There are his servants, like the disciples, but there are also his enemies, like the ones who grumbled when he had dinner with a sinner like Zaccheus, and the ones who would soon hand him over to be mocked and scourged and killed.

You know what's interesting about this story? It didn't matter what these rebellious citizens did. That nobleman was still king. You see, we, by our own

faith or obedience, don't determine whether or not Jesus is king. He is who he is because of who he is, not because we vote for him or endorse him. It's not like electing a president or a mayor. Our faith doesn't MAKE him king nor does our rebellion cancel his kingship.

B. The king returns: So in the next part of the parable, the nobleman returns.

"When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. The first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.' The second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.' Another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' Then he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.' I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence" (vv. 15-27).

We can see here that the return of Jesus Christ will be a time of accountability. We don't want to pass over that too quickly. Sooner or later, everyone must deal with the King. For some that's good news, but for others that's a terrifying thought.

1. His enemies are held accountable:

Once again, there are two groups that are held accountable here. Let's deal with the last group first. These are the ones who didn't want him to reign over them. In Jesus' day, it was the ones who were about to put him on the cross. Today, these are the ones who say, "I'm my own boss. I run my own life. I do things my way. I don't want anyone reigning over me." I was watching that show *C.S.I.* the other night and Grissam is this chief Crime Scene Investigator and he's kind of this distant, mysterious, scientific guy. Somehow the subject of God came up and someone asked him what he thought. His answer was classic. He said, "I believe in God. I believe in science. But

what I don't believe in is religion. I don't believe my life is to be lived by a set of rules even if they are handed down by the Creator himself. Many people have fought wars and battles in the name of Christ. It's not God I do not believe in but religion." It sounds kind of good, doesn't it? But basically, that's another way of saying what these citizens in the story say, "We don't want you reigning over us. Don't tell us how to live our lives." Jesus says that's a dangerous way to live because the King will come back and hold you accountable for that decision, and the decision we make is a matter of life and death.

2. His servants are held accountable: But Jesus also holds the other group accountable. He calls his servants to come before him and tell him what they've done with his money. The first two have done well. They have put his mina to work. The first one made 1,000% and the second made 500%. And so, as the master says to the first servant, they proved faithful.

Why were they faithful? What was their motive? If you look carefully at their words you'll see the key to their mindset. They both speak to the master and say, "YOUR mina has made this much." They knew who it belonged to. They knew he was the owner and they were just the managers. With that they would have known that whatever profit they made would not be theirs, but his. At the same time, they must have also trusted their Master. They must have believed if they were faithful to their Master, he would be faithful to them. I don't think they put his minas to work because of what they would get out of it, but I do think they trusted him to take care of them.

And take care of them he did. The guy who made ten minas got to rule over 10 cities and the guy who made five minas got to rule over five cities. That's quite a promotion! That's like going from working at McDonald's to being the Governor of California. And isn't it interesting that the reward to the faithful is not rest and relaxation, but more responsibility? He doesn't say, "Well done! Here are your tickets to Hawaii." No! They get more work! But if you think about it, it makes sense. Here's an example: My daughter is a soccer player up at Whitworth College in Spokane and she is now in Spring workouts. Now she is working very hard this spring for one reason. What is it? It's to be rewarded by being on the starting team come Fall. So she is working hard in order to be rewarded with more work. It's kind of goofy, but that's how it is in sports. That's how it is in the work place. As an athlete, the last thing you want is someone to say, "You've done such a great job. Here, sit on the bench and relax." Who wants their boss to say, "Here, take a permanent vacation"? We always think we need less work and more rest, but God rewards the faithful with more work. Heaven will not be all harps and choirs and clouds and streets of gold. We'll have responsibility. Paul told the Corinthians, "**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?**" (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

Perhaps all of that wasn't as important to them as what he said prior to that: "Well done." That's what they wanted to hear more than anything else. "Well done." Even an athlete who gets the starting job wants to hear that. That's what YOU want to hear, isn't it? That's what you want to know, isn't it? That God is pleased with your work. All you have to do is be faithful. I'm not saying that's easy. As a matter of fact, it would have been hard to put those minas to work in a country where most of the citizens were rebelling against their master! Those people would know who those servants were working for. That could be dangerous. It's hard for us, too. But we have to remember he's the one who told us to put it to work, and so we can trust him that even if we seem to fail, even if what we have to offer gets put right back in our face, he will be pleased. He called us to be faithful, not successful.

You see, that's what the third servant didn't get. He says, "Master, here is your mina, which I put away in a handkerchief." It's like he's bragging about how careful he's been. But do you know what the surprise of the story is? The surprise of the story is that this man is judged, not because of bad investments, but because he made no investments at all. He did nothing morally wrong. He didn't steal the master's money. He didn't blow it on wine and women. He didn't go to Vegas and lose it at the tables. The problem is not wild rebellion here. The problem is fear. "I was afraid of you," he says. His conservatism and inaction were born of fear and mistrust. There are many people like this. They believe in God. They attend church. They try to remember the Golden Rule. There is a place for all of that in their lives. But when it comes to investing in the kingdom; when it comes to risking themselves or their resources for the King, they hold back. They wrap their faith in a handkerchief and conserve it.

The reason the third servant acts like this is seen in what he says about his master's character. He says, "You're an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow." In other words, "You really can't be trusted to have my best interests in mind. You're the kind of guy who gets rich on the backs of others. You're the kind of guy who can suck blood out of a stone. I had to be careful."

And the master doesn't argue with him on this point. Instead, he uses his own logic to condemn him. "By your own words I will judge you. If you knew I was that kind of man why didn't you put it in the bank and collect interest?" It's not that he IS that kind of man, it's just that whatever standard we use, twisted or accurate, he'll still call us to a place of accountability. So instead of rewarding him, he takes away the one mina he has and gives it to the one who has ten.

I have to confess that I see a lot of myself in this third servant. There are times when I think to

myself, "How can I possibly get up there and preach? How can I possibly think I can be a leader of God's people? I have so many inconsistencies in my life. Then I begin to think what a hypocrite I am and how God hates hypocrites. And then I think that I would be better off just removing myself from any kind of public ministry because it's just too risky. God expects too much and I can't live up to those expectations. So when the Master comes and calls me to account, at least I can say that I didn't lose what he gave me. "I still believe in you, Lord. I still read my bible. I still pray. I still go to church. But ministry? I couldn't risk that." I guess in the world of investing, risk management a good thing. But in the real world of God's Kingdom, managing risk is a way to poverty.

You see, everything comes down to how you view the Master. Do you view him as one you can trust? If you do, you can step out boldly to serve him. You can put your minas to work without any fear of reprisal if you fail. Go back to my soccer analogy. If my daughter had a coach who criticized her every time she kicked or headed the ball, what would she do? Sooner or later, she would be paralyzed in fear. Her performance would plummet because she would have lost all confidence to do anything. That can happen to us, even as believers. We've molded God in to the image of a severe and unfair coach who won't let up on us, so we get to a place where we just hide our gifts and talents in a handkerchief.

But God is not like that. He can be trusted. Here is some good news: The One who commanded you to put his resources to work can be trusted to be there for us when we do. You see, one of the things this parable doesn't communicate is that we're NOT left alone in this endeavor. Upon departing, Jesus sent his Spirit into the world. He even said, "It's better that I leave because if I leave I will send you my Spirit. He will be with you always. He will guide you, teach you, encourage you." Jesus called him a "counselor." What a great thought. The Holy Spirit is our investment counselor. He counsels us in where to place our minas. In a sense, he even allows us to "take up what we did not lay down and reap what we did not sow."

I had an experience like that a couple of days ago. I was out on the baseball field getting ready for a practice. I saw a guy I've known through baseball for at least six years. I've never said a word to him about Jesus. But I was just chatting to him about his stepson who is a freshman at a Catholic high school. Out of the blue, he said to me, "He's learning all about Jesus and he just can't get enough of it. He's never heard any of that growing up, but now he's all into Jesus." I was dumbfounded. I said, "That's cool." What a dumb thing to say! But I thought, "I think I'm reaping where I did not sow. Praise God!" That's what the Spirit does!

CONCLUSION

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't sow. The whole point of the parable is that we need to sow; we need to invest. And the good news is that God will multiply your minas more than you can ask or think. So I ask you, how are you investing your life? What are you doing with your time? What are you doing with your gifts and talents? What are you doing with your money and possessions? What are you doing with your relationships? This parable has told us that we are held accountable. Someone has said, "Between the great things we can't do and the little things we won't do, the danger is we shall do nothing at all." That's what the Master will not tolerate—that we do nothing at all.