

Luke 19/11-27: THE PARABLE OF THE TEN MINAS

v11 – The setting of (occasion for) the parable: “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.” (cf. 17/20-25)

Clearly the parable is going to be about the kingdom and the fact that it is not going to come at once.

v12-27 – The parable, which has two (related) subjects:

1. A king & his kingdom (v12,14-15a,27) – the framework (*covers/inclusio*) for the story (book) between

v12 Jesus is the “man of noble birth” who goes to “a distant country” (heaven) to be “appointed king” and “then to return” (his second coming). Scripture clearly presents his ascension as a *coronation*, his present seat at the right hand of the Father as a *throne*, and his high priestly ministry there as a *reign* – i.e. he has been made *king* (He 1/3f,8f,13; 2/5-9; 1 Co 15/24ff).

v14 The “subjects” who “hated him” and didn’t “want this man to be our king” are both the Jewish people (Jn 1/11 cf. Lk 9/22) and mankind (v10 cf. Is 53/3), who in general rejected him at his first coming.

v15a “He was made king, however”. In such terse terms God dismisses any (arrogant) sense of choice mankind may demand to have about, or any rebellious objection to, his appointed king. Jesus is and will be king – period

v27 Those who reject Jesus’ kingship are “enemies” and will perish (cf. 20/15f). Our acceptance or rejection of Jesus as king – *now*, before he returns – is decisive for what happens to us when he returns. (These words are specially resonant in the light of Jesus’ imminent rejection in Jerusalem.)

2. What the king’s servants are to do between his comings (v13,15b-26) – the story between the covers

Before he leaves to be made king, the nobleman gives one mina each to ten of his servants (ten merely signifies a complete number). While he is gone (“until I come back”), they are to “Put this money to work” (v13). When he returns, he sends for those ten servants “in order to find out what they had gained with it” (v15b).

Having told us that the kingdom was not going to *appear* at once (on this visit to Jerusalem), that there would be a period of unknown duration before he returned and consummated the kingdom, i.e. brought the kingdom in a *visible* way (vs its invisible nature now: 17/20f), Jesus tells us what he expects his servants to do in the interim. This is no vacuum or empty waiting period; the between-the-times is to be filled not only with mission but an investment in the kingdom by each of his servants. Each

one is given something to work with – natural endowments, spiritual gifts, time, opportunities, etc. God expects us to use these to advance his kingdom, and at the end of the age he will call us to give account for what we have done with what we received (cf. 12/48b). Of course, it's not literally money that we're given to invest – although for a few it may include this.

The first two servants do invest their mina and earn more minas with it. Both of these servants are commended as “good” and trustworthy” (implied with the second) and receive a reward for doing so (v16-19). The reward in each case is proportional to the return – but it is noteworthy that the second servant is also commended and rewarded, even though his return was less than the first servant's. (He is not penalised for having less ‘fruit’: he was fruitful to the extent he could be?) Again, “cities” is no more literal to our heavenly reward than money is to our earthly investment: the point is that, having been faithful with what we were given (with little, with another man's property), God will give us increased responsibility and influence hereafter (much, property of your own – cf. Lk 16/10-12). But in each case the reward, while proportional to the return, is completely disproportionate to the investment and the faithfulness shown! This is gracious gift, not earned remuneration!

A third servant, however, fails to invest his mina – or even to put it on deposit so it could gain interest. He does not lose or spend it, but safe-keeps and returns it – yet is rebuked as “wicked” (v20-23). The clear inference is that just to hold onto what God has given us and not use/invest it is not acceptable to him. (You don't lose, misuse or squander what God has given to you – but you don't use and increase it either.) The servant's wrong understanding of his master's character (“you are a hard man”) caused a wrong attitude towards him (“I was afraid of you”). This, rather than laziness or irresponsibility, seems to have been the cause of his inactivity. The master judges him by his own words: he is *not* like that – as his reward of the first two servants (totally beyond what their faithfulness/investment warranted) has just shown. But if he was, then the servant had all the more reason to act differently. (Is this a case of when we live with a wrong idea of God it becomes true for us?)

The conclusion to the parable (v24-26) is surprising: the master orders the mina to be taken away from the third servant and given to the first. If our thinking is worldly (especially if it bows before the contemporary idol of equality and egalitarianism), our reaction will be the same as those standing by: “Sir, he already has ten!” – i.e. how unjust, how unfair! But if we understand the ‘economy’ of the kingdom (the imperative to advance it, and the king's forceful desire in this regard), then it makes perfect sense: why leave something that could gain value with someone who does nothing with it; give it to someone who will use it – indeed, to the one who gets the best return on his investment. So for this reason, “to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.” This is the main point or truth to this parable; it is an abiding kingdom principle with variable application (see, for example, how we interpreted it in 8/18).

Cf. The Parable of the Talents (Mw 25/14-30)

The Parable of the Ten Minas begs comparison with a similar parable found in Matthew, the Parable of the Talents. So similar are they that one would be excused for wondering if it wasn't the same parable, and that either Matthew and/or Luke got

some of the details muddled. But we know that Jesus told the same parable on more than one occasion, and quite probably told similar parables on different occasions to illustrate the same (or similar) spiritual truth. He told the Ten Minas just before his final entry into Jerusalem, and the Talents right at the end of several days of teaching in Jerusalem, just before his passion. They are complementary.

There are many similarities between the two parables but also some striking differences. (1) In Luke, each servant receives the same amount; in Matthew, the servants receive a different endowment to invest – five, two and one talent, “each according to their ability”. God does not play our politically correct games: he is free and sovereign, and gives different gifts and *measures* as he chooses (cf. Ro 12/3,6; 1 Co 12/11,28). In the parable, the endowment is according to ability; outside the parable, God’s endowment may determine ability.

(2) In Luke, the first two servants earn a different return on an equal investment (and are rewarded differently); in Matthew, they earn an equivalent return (they both double their talents) on a different investment (and are rewarded equally). The former suggests we can return to different degrees on what God has given us, and are rewarded accordingly; the latter suggests that God is equally pleased if each returns according to their ability.

(3) In Luke, the third servant is merely stripped of his talent (death is reserved only for those who didn’t want Jesus to be king over them); in Matthew, the third “worthless” servant is thrown into hell. Of course, one must never ‘argue from silence’: Luke’s parable does not rule out this possibility; it just fails to mention it. But it does mean that we could possibly identify the “servants” in Luke’s parable with believers: we are all saved equally to serve the king; those that invest what he gives us in salvation and increase it are rewarded; those that don’t are saved but get no reward. But Matthew’s parable definitely identifies the “servants” as mankind – for believers cannot be cast into hell. And in a secondary, albeit often unrecognized, way, all men *are* created to serve God and his purposes on the earth (Ge 1). Men that do serve God, using what he’s given them to do so (i.e. believers), are welcomed into heaven; men who don’t (men who have a wrong understanding of God and hence a wrong attitude toward him) are cast into hell.

(4) Both parables (but especially Matthew’s) reflect the mysterious relationship between divine sovereignty/ election and human responsibility/freedom that we find throughout Scripture. In some things God deals equally with all men, but in other things he doesn’t (and yet is always righteous). We cannot argue with that – and we don’t even always know which; he chooses. And yet, in either case (whether we have all been given the same or differently), it is not as though there is nothing we can do to affect his choice: in both parables, by being faithful with what God sovereignly gives us, there is the possibility (as with the third servant) he gives us more!