

The Parable of the Ten Minas

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Flip with me to Luke 19. Luke 19. Martin Luther, the ever quotable one, said, even if I knew that tomorrow, the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.

What would you do if you knew that tomorrow the world would end? If you knew that Jesus would come and carry you back to eternal life, most likely you wouldn't plant an apple tree, right?

Maybe you would deny it, say, I'm just going to keep on living like it isn't true, you know, keep on living life like it didn't matter. Maybe you would seek to escape it, you know, we like to do that in some parts of the country.

Build a bomb shelter, stockpile your ammo and your canned goods. Or maybe you would just party. You'd do something crazy. Go skydiving or Rocky Mountain climbing or 3.7 seconds or whatever it is on a bull, you know?

[1 : 20] Or maybe you'd just worship. If you knew that the world was in the end and you're going to pass into heaven in just a few moments, maybe you'd just seclude yourself in your prayer closet and devote your time to prayer and praise.

But what would you do if you knew that the world would end soon, but at a time when you least expect it? Because when the Bible talks about the end, it never gives us a date or a time.

And many men have come and announced a date and a time and been wrong. But the Bible does say we're to live as if it could come any time.

This morning we turned to a parable specifically designed that shows how to live right now in these days in between Jesus' first coming and his return. It's the last parable Jesus shares on his way to Jerusalem.

Remember, we've been talking about that while we were in Luke. You know, he's teaching in Jericho now. And at the beginning of chapter 19, he has that interaction with Zacchaeus, the wee little man.

[2 : 23] And then after this parable, he turns to make the last walk, the 17-mile walk up from Jericho to Jerusalem.

And this parable is specifically designed for us. If you're our guest, I'm reading from the English Standard Version. So let's turn our attention to the Word of God.

Luke writes, As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell them a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

He said, Therefore, a noble man went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas and said to them, Engage in business until I come.

But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, We do not want this man to reign over us. When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business.

[3 : 38] Verse 16, The first came before him, saying, Lord, your mina has made ten minas more. And he said, Well done, good servant.

Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities. The second came, Lord, your mina has made five minas.

And he said to him, And you are to be over five cities. Then another came, saying, Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief.

For I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and you reap what you did not sow. He said to him, I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant.

You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit, and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming, I might have collected it with interest?

[4 : 43] And he said to those who stood by, I take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has ten minas. And they said to him, Lord, he has ten minas. I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but to the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

But as for these enemies of mine, who do not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slaughter them before me. That is the word of God.

The only authoritative and inerrant word you'll hear this morning. You know, the parable, or this parable, centers around a man with many servants.

You know, in many ways, the backdrop to this parable is much like many parables that we have studied. There was a man who had an estate or a kingdom which he owned and controlled.

Now, quite obviously, the man gathers ten of his servants and gives each of them a mina. So this man is clearly generous. He entrusts them with a generous amount of money. A mina in that day was worth 100 days' wages.

[5 : 55] So in comparison with the average wage in the United States, that would be something like \$16,000. I don't know about you, but \$16,000 entrusted to me would make a difference this morning if anybody's got their checkbook out, you know?

But he gives them this money, a generous sum of money, and all that he gives them is meant to be used carefully during a certain period of time. Remember, he said, I'm going away to receive a kingdom, and then I'll return to check on you, right?

I'll turn so that you can give an account. Now, what does it mean to go away to receive a kingdom?

What's this parable talking about? You know, many believe this is a reference to Herod the Great. One of the things we've noticed in studying these parables is that during the first century, Jerusalem was ruled by Rome. And everybody knows how vast the Roman Empire was, and the Romans would place smaller kings throughout their empire to reign in these smaller areas.

And Herod the Great was one of these kings, but the way he became king was by traveling to Rome to be declared king over Jerusalem. Does that make sense?

[7 : 11] So Herod did that in about 4 BC, and 40 years later, his son did the same thing. But quite obviously, beneath that, that, what is kind of implied underneath this, is what our Lord is about to do when he goes to Jerusalem, and he goes away to claim a kingdom and one day return.

So the man is going away to become a king. He's going to come back to rule over his kingdom, and all the focus in the parable is about what happens while he is away.

All the attention of the parable is focused on what happens while he's away and before he returns.

And so while he's away, he says, take the money I give you and engage in business.

Look down there with me. He says, call in ten servants. He gave them ten minus and said to them, engage in business until I come.

Now every businessman knows you have to spend money to make money, and so he fronts them money and tells them to do business with it. But Jesus quickly adds.

[8 : 24] He tells them to engage in business, but look at verse 14. His citizens hated him and sent a delegation after them, saying, we don't want this man to reign over us.

So he calls them to engage in business, knowing very well that they will face much opposition. Now before long, the man presumably went away to Rome and he comes back to take over his kingdom, right?

And he calls three servants to come to him and he asks them to give an account for their business.

The first servant, he says, you know, the servant says, Lord, your mina made for me ten minas.

That's a thousand percent profit.

And he says, well done, good servant, because you've been faithful in a little, he'll have authority over ten cities. Now notice, he points out how faithful he's been even in the midst of opposition.

The second servant comes to him, Lord, your mina has made five minas more. That's 500 percent.

And he said, you've done well too. You're over five cities.

[9 : 29] He too was faithful, right? But the third servant, just when we expect to find another example of overwhelming profit, the third servant essentially says, Lord, here is your mina back.

I didn't want to lose anything. So I tucked it away for safekeeping. I know you're a hard man, taking what you do not deposit and reaping what you do not sow.

And the whole story comes to a sudden halt. All the eyes are on the king and this third servant, right?

Now what's this all about? What's he talking about? You take what you did not deposit, you reap what you did not. So having been busted for his unfaithfulness, what is the servant trying to do? Now, perhaps he is afraid of the king. Now what we know about the king, there's nothing to be afraid of except he's maybe too generous.

[10 : 39] Or was he trying to compliment the king to take attention off his unfaithfulness? Perhaps it's like when one of the children comes by and says, Dad, you're such a great dad.

I hope you're having a wonderful day, a great day because you, Dad, deserve it. Now, experience tells me in that situation to ask two questions.

What did you do and what do you want? The same thing is going on with this servant. He isn't confessing fear in this moment.

He's trying to compliment the king. He isn't defending his unfaithfulness. He's flattering him. He's changing the subject. He's saying, you're a great man. You do whatever you want.

You have whatever you want. And here's where the parable gets completely brilliant. To a wicked king, this would be encouraging. He would say, you're right.

[11 : 39] I am a great man. I do get what I want. I am the man. But to this king, it's not encouraging at all.

It's insulting. You see, the servant has gotten the king all wrong. He's not money hungry. He's not ready to take what isn't his. He's not about profit or the bottom line.

He's after something else. And we know this because of how he responds to the servant's flattery. So this servant kind of tries to flatter him to take attention off his unfaithfulness.

And he doesn't immediately fire him or throw him out. He turns to the servant and he turns his flattery back on him. You see, he says, if I am the way you say I am, why didn't you do business with the money?

You knew I would gain a profit, right? You knew I would reap, right? If you believe all those things, you should have lived differently. The point is, if he was all about profit, he would have taken that servant out and ended the conversation.

[12 : 42] Instead, the king takes the servant's mina and gives it to the first servant. He rewards the first servant again, not for his profit, but for his faithfulness.

Now this parable is filled with terms of business, money, deposits, banks, but we aren't meant to focus on return or gains or fruit. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem and his death and knows he will soon depart this world and return labor, he calls us not to success, but to faithfulness.

He calls us not to profit, but to stand firm and faithfully for Christ as he returns. You know, where we're going with this before we unpack it, three points, is the only life that matters for Christ is one of costly faithfulness.

The only life that matters for Christ is one of costly faithfulness. So we're going to unpack this and try to understand this difficult parable in three points. The first is, faithfulness is doing the same things over and over because they're the right things.

Faithfulness is doing the same things over and over because they're the right thing. You know, it's so hard to get the idea of business and gains and losses out of our mind when studying this parable, but it's vital, in my opinion.

[14 : 03] The king entrusts them with a minor not to see how fruitful they will be, but to see how faithful they'll be. That's a big shift for us in America because of our capitalist economy and the way we often think.

The king was not out to try to get their profit, but to gauge their commitment. That's why he rejoices with both of the first two servants, though their profits were quite different.

One was a thousand percent, right? And he rejoiced. One was a five hundred percent, and you know, he rejoices as well. He gives them five things. Faithfulness is the only thing this king cares about, and that's why he doesn't fire the third servant immediately.

The emphasis upon faithfulness and not fruitfulness is what makes this parable so striking. That's why we've got to take that lens off.

In a world where success is chased and managed, measured, and maintained for all the world to see, this parable stands out. To say faithfulness may not always equal fruitfulness.

[15:13] Faithfulness may not always equal success. I think as Jesus is approaching Jerusalem and telling his disciples what to do while they wait for his return, he's not telling them make a lot of money.

He's not telling them to be as fruitful as possible. He's not even telling them to make as many converts as possible. There's something he cares about more than that.

He's saying essentially stand your ground, do what is right, be faithful. One of the lies that seeps into our hearts is that if we're not fruitful right now in the way we think we ought to be, we must not be being faithful.

We can begin to believe this if the business is not growing. Or if we seem to be making little progress in fighting our anger.

I remember one time having a conflict with my wife and she just said, that's what you do. you respond impatiently and critically.

[16:37] Often we think, I must not be being faithful if the kids are still struggling. Or maybe one's completely wandered away.

And we must be very careful in those moments. One of the recurring themes of scripture is men and women who experience little fruitfulness and find little earthly significance yet who are faithful. I'll never forget several years ago, Kim and I went to Italy and had the privilege of going to visit kind of all the art that is there.

And we went to the Sistine Chapel. You know, we hiked the Duomo, St. Peter's Basilica. We went to Sistine Chapel. And I'm not a huge art guy.

But I was totally intrigued with the Sistine Chapel because up in the ceiling, you know, the ceiling is what everybody's all about except for the far wall.

[17:37] But the ceiling, it was intriguing to me what stories from the Bible were captured in these paintings. They weren't all the ones I thought would be there. But there were certain ones.

And when I was moving around the scene, you know, you can't tell the name underneath them, but as I was moving around the room, studying the picture until I knew who it was, I was completely struck by the painting of Jeremiah.

If you've seen the painting, Jeremiah is sitting down with his head, or his hand, covering his face. And I just thought, that is so right.

His only message to Israel was you have sinned against God and judgment is coming. Jeremiah saw very little fruit.

In fact, he's covering his face because he's weeping over the destruction of Israel and Judah. So the message in Jeremiah and all throughout the Bible is not faithfulness equals fruitfulness.

[18:49] The message of Jeremiah and the rest of the Bible is leave the fruit to God, but you be faithful. So what is faithfulness?

I've articulated my definition. Faithfulness is doing the same things over and over because they are the right things. In many ways, I think the reason Jesus does a parable about doing business is not so we try to make a profit, so to speak, so that he would think, we would know that faithfulness has everything to do with our daily life.

All throughout, the gospel has been marching forward to this point and Jesus knows that he'll soon leave this world. He's drawing near Jerusalem. It's emphasized three times in our chapter and after Jerusalem, he's going away to receive his kingdom, but he stops here, tells this parable, and he's saying, I'm not setting up a throne in Jerusalem.

I'm going away to receive my kingdom and even though I am away, don't wait for me or don't just wait. Do business. Take the life and the gifts I've given you and focus on them in day-to-day faithfulness.

Do you see? The emphasis on business is not so that we would be all about profit, but so that we would be all about obeying him and serving him in daily life. Doing the same things over and over and expecting different results is the definition of insanity.

[20:12] That's what Einstein said, but doing the same things over and over because of the right thing is the definition of faithfulness. So in calling us to live for the life to come, Jesus calls us to be

radically preoccupied with this life.

Faithfulness is a present preoccupation and orientation. It means we love God, love our neighbor, honor our parents, show hospitality, keep stowing away the excess so that we can quickly give it away.

Right? This life's about to pass, so we love mercy, work hard, make the lives of others better through our work, influence our neighbors for Christ, turn off our phone and be completely there with real friends.

Faithfulness explodes in a thousand different ways in normal life. Point two, faithfulness is not safe or easy.

Faithfulness is not safe or easy. The important difference between the first two servants and the third servants is not how much they made, but how much they put on the line.

[21 : 29] You see, the crucial difference between those three servants is not how much they made, but how much they put on the line. The first servant takes his mind and puts it all on the line.

Second servant takes his mind and puts it all on the line. The third servant plays it safe, right? He tucks it in his handkerchief. He hides it.

He stows it away for safe keeping. Reminds me of last week. Reminds us not to save too much. He avoids the ridicule, right, of being one of the king's men.

He sidesteps the trouble and pain. You know, often we think faithfulness is the safe course, the easy course, as the path with less risk and less cost, as the easier path.

As if faithfulness is for those who stay, but risk is for those who go. But this passage begs us to think otherwise. Faithfulness is about doing business, about facing enemies, about facing hardship, and standing, and faithfully standing and doing what is right.

[22 : 39] In the history of Christianity in most parts of the world, following Christ and being faithful is filled with trouble. Earlier this week, I was reading about a pastor who taught in a ministry school in Latvia years ago.

Latvia, and I had to look this up on my Wikipedia, but Latvia is a, I did know it was a country, but although I don't know all the countries of the world, Latvia is an Eastern European country, formerly a part of the Soviet Union, Communist Russia.

The pastor was interviewing prospective students for this kind of a seminary type training school, and he asked colleagues, what questions are important to ask for this school?

And they said, the most important question is, when were you baptized? Now that pastor said, why? Why does the date of baptism matter?

They answered, if they were baptized in the time of Soviet rule, they risked their lives to follow Christ and risked their future. If they were baptized after liberation, then we have many more questions.

[23 : 47] The point is, following Christ and being faithful often means trouble. It meant it in the first century. It means it.

Now it's costly. It's not safe. Christianity is not always good for the family. It's not always good for business. It's not always good for upward mobility or our reputations or our friendship.

Jesus is very clear. Following him is not the easy path, right? He said, I didn't come to bring peace. I came to bring a sword. He said, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head and so too his disciple.

He says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me for whoever would save his life must lose it. Whoever loses his life must save it. That's why Jesus says, count the cost.

Often times when we present the gospel, we don't tell people to count the cost, but Jesus said, count the cost. Why? Because following Christ will often feel like losing. If you're living, if you're living full tilt for Christ, you'll lose your time, your money, your energy.

[24 : 55] You'll give up dream homes and dream vacations. You'll give up countless freedoms and take on more and more burdens. It's not the easy life. Many days you'll feel like you're losing it all and you'll seem like you're only getting back more trouble.

Following Christ means you lose your best life now. It means you, the point is, you put it all on the line. If you're following Christ, you're leveraging your whole life.

You're holding nothing back. I love the way Paul puts this in 1 Corinthians when he's talking about the resurrection. He says, if we who have hope in this life only were of all people most to be pitied.

What he's trying to say is that the resurrection did not happen, Christianity's not real, then we should be pitied more than anyone else on earth. Why? Because following Christ meant we lost our lives. Now, my point is that if we don't have many regrets in that moment, then we may not be following Christ.

If Christianity is not real and we can still look back on our lives and say, I had a good life, then we've missed it. We haven't put it all on the line.

[26 : 11] We've probably tucked some away. If there's not a sense in which if that is not true, if the resurrection is not true, Jesus did not real, that we look back on our lives and say, that was a waste, that we may not be biblical Christians.

That's why the gospel just continues to call us to a deeper trust and if we're not trusting, calls us to it again. Again, the secret of life is the surpassing gain found in Jesus Christ. That's why Paul said, I counted all its loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ.

My Lord, the gain is not this life, but freedom from sin and joy in Christ. Freedom from guilt, but also freedom from living as if anything in this life mattered.

Now, I must say, this message is not meant to be corrective. I'm trying to preach the text. You guys are totally great.

Totally. You guys are falling, that made me think of Bill and Ted's Bogus Adventure, so, which dates me. If you don't know about it, probably good.

[27 : 31] you're following Christ and sacrificing so much for this, for this little church plan.

You should be encouraged. The Lord might be pricking your heart in some way, but I don't have that in my mind. And let me encourage you, too.

One thing that stands out to me is your trouble has an expiration date. What is it that troubles you? Jesus says, it's trouble to follow Him.

There's a cross. Maybe it's your job that never seems to satisfy, or your chronic physical pain, or your agonizing quickness to anger, your disappointment with your family.

your cross will soon expire. Jesus will take it off. And let me be clear also. I'm not saying any other life is more satisfying.

[28 : 39] Jesus' promise is true. Whoever loses His life for my sake will find it. Falling Christ and losing everything that fall in is the most deeply satisfying life.

J. Campbell White says it like this, very provokingly, most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Most men and women.

Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within His followers except the adoption of Christ's purposes toward the world He came to redeem. Fame, pleasure, and riches are but husk and ashes.

in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of His eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards.

I think that's what this parable is after. not after chasing profit but putting it all on the line for Christ such that we get to heaven completely poor and completely overwhelmed with joy.

[29 : 56] Point three, faithfulness receives great rewards. Faithfulness receives great rewards. The Bible assigns no higher compliment of men and women than being faithful.

Proverbs 26 says, many a man proclaims his own steadfast love but a faithful man who can find. So it's no surprise that the king in the parable rewards the first and second servant for their faithfulness. Remember, it's not for their profit, not for their success. He says, well done, good servant, because you've been faithful in a little, you have authority over ten cities. To the second he says, same thing. You've been faithful in a little, you'll have authority over five cities.

The parable directs our attention to the great rewards faithfulness brings. The idea is we're in this in-between season where all that we do and all that we're trying to be about is to give an account on that day.

The king has come and all of our life, all of our possessions are merely things that we steward so that we can be prepared to present them to the king and there'll be a judgment, not a judgment whereby our salvation is in the balance because we're completely secure through Jesus Christ, but there will be a judgment where we'll give an account for all that we've done in the body and that's what's going on here.

[31 : 14] As I've said several weeks ago, all Christians in that day will not hear, well done, good and faithful servant. Scripture shows that some will not because they've lived for this life and what they have will be taken from them.

It's exceedingly sobering truth, but I think it's true. All Christians will not have the same amount of rewards. I think that's what's going on. When one gets ten, one gets five, obviously in heaven there'll be no envy so that's great.

So we'll be celebrating with the ten and the five and our one minor or my one minor. That's why the first servant is rewarded in that way. Both rewards are generous, far more than they deserve, but they're not equal.

It's not America in heaven. There's no doctrine of equanimity in the Bible, no participation trophies, right? But all Christians are meant to be spurred on by faithfulness, or spurred on by these rewards to faithfulness.

These rewards are meant to motivate us. They're meant to spur us on. It's so fitting that we conclude our series on the parables looking to Jesus' return and the promise of great rewards.

[32 : 29] with Him. Again and again, Jesus repeatedly calls us to live for these things. We've seen them again and again throughout the parables. He's not looking for success or fruitfulness. He's not looking for perfect acts of obedience.

His eyes are not drawn to the wealthy or powerful or best looking. His eyes see through all facades. He is looking everywhere for the faithful. They're not always found in the pulpit or the C-suite or the positions of power.

They're often hard to find. They're doing the little things that few notice week in, week out, year in, year out and seem to have little, very little to show for their lives. But the Lord sees.

That's what this passage tells us. He promises that all who are faithful in a little in this life will gain great reward in the next and they will hear Him say, well done, good and faithful servant.

This is the greatest reward of all, not a crown in heaven or authority or in heaven or riches. In heaven, the greatest reward of all is the King of all, the Father of all, declaring well done that we've spent this life exactly as we ought and put it all on the line for Jesus Christ such that He would stand over us and rejoice over us and say, well done, good and faithful servant.

[34 : 02] Faithfulness is, in the end, it's the only thing that matters. Nothing else matters. several years ago, one of my favorite writers, Dr. Don Carson, wrote a simple biography of his dad called *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor*.

Now, Tom Carson was an ordinary, a completely ordinary pastor. He labored and served only small churches in Canada, French-speaking Canada, in the early part of the 20th century.

In a day when the ordinary is overlooked, Dr. Carson wrote this book to tell his dad's story and of heaven's perspective of ordinary faithfulness.

The end of the book is completely amazing. Dr. Carson writes, Tom Carson never wrote a book. But he loved the book.

He was never wealthy or powerful, but he kept growing as a Christian. Yesterday's grace was never enough. He was not a farsighted visionary, but he looked forward to eternity.

[35 : 26] He was not a gifted administrator, but there is no verse that says, by this all men should know that you are my disciples if you are good administrators.

His journals have many, many entries bathed in contrition. But his children and grandchildren remember his laughter.

Only rarely did he break through his pattern of reserve and speak deeply and intimately with his children, but he modeled Christian virtue for them.

He continues, he much preferred to avoid controversy and didn't like to stir things up. He was not very good at putting people down except on his prayer list.

When he died, there were no crowds outside the hospital. No editorial comments in the paper, no announcements on the television, no mention in parliament, no attention paid by the nation.

[36 : 34] In his hospital room, there was no one by his bedside. It was only the quiet hiss of oxygen, vainly venting because he had stopped breathing and would never need it again.

But on the other side, all the trumpets sounded. Dad won entrance to the only throne room that matters, not because he was a good man or a great man.

He was, after all, a most ordinary pastor, but because he was a forgiven man. And he heard the voice of him whom he longed to hear, saying, well done, good and faithful servant.

