

KINGDOM. SUPPLEMENT 15

[THE PARABLES OF JESUS] THE TEN MINAS

“The parable of the ten minas” in Luke 19:11-27 is a parable about the
REWARDS IN GOD’S KINGDOM.

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

Read Luke 19:11-27.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The nobleman who travelled abroad to receive a kingship. It was not unusual in the days of Jesus for someone to go to Rome in order to obtain a kingdom. In the story, this nobleman already commanded a very high position, because he had subjects and servants.

He gave one mina to each of ten of his servants. This nobleman wanted his servants to put his money to work. One “mina” was a Greek coin worth one hundred drachmas, and one drachma was the accepted wages of a labourer for one day’s work. In contrast to the parable of the talents, the nobleman gave to each of his servants exactly the same amount.

The assignment (task). The nobleman ordered his servants, “Put this money to work until I come back.” Although one mina was much smaller than one talent, the emphasis in this story is not on the amount of money, but rather on what is done with the money. The money must be put to work right up to the time when the nobleman returns as the king!

Some subjects hated and rejected him. Also this was not unusual in the time of Jesus. Some people desired power and fame and travelled to Rome to try to secure a position of influence. However, other people in the same country feared their tyranny. So they would often send a delegation to Rome to frustrate that man’s efforts to become king over them. This happened to Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus as well as to Archelaus in the history just before Christ’s first coming.

At his return, the king rewarded his faithful servants. The nobleman who had become king, ordered his servants to give an account of what they had done with their one mina. The first servant humbly reported that the king’s mina had earned ten more minas! Likewise, the second servant reported that the king’s mina had earned five more minas. The king commended his faithful servants and assigned tasks to them in exact proportion to the profit they had made. They were given the tasks to control ten and five cities respectively.

At his return, the king punished his unfaithful servant and had his enemies killed who did not want him to be king over them. Like the servant in the parable of the talents, the servant who did not put his mina to work was wicked and lazy. He too accused his master of being harsh and unfair. And likewise, the master used his own words to condemn him. If this servant really believed that his master was harsh and unfair, he would have feared his master and would have worked very hard in order to escape punishment. But he did not really believe what he said. This only proves that this servant was not telling the truth, but was only seeking to blame his master for his own negligence and laziness!

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of “the story” of the parable may consist of “the setting” and “the explanation or application” of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke 19:1-11.

Jesus told the parable of the ten minas to people in and around the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2). Some of them were criticising Jesus for being a guest in the house of a *sinner*, the former corrupt tax collector (Luke 19:7), while others

were glad to hear Jesus saying that he had come “to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus told the parable because the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once (Luke 19:11). The Jews in the time of Jesus were constantly looking for God’s kingdom to appear (John 6:15). They expected that God’s kingdom would be *an outward earthly kingdom with Jerusalem and the Jews as its centre* and they expected that it would appear imminently. Even the disciples of Jesus had such expectations (Mark 10:35-45; Acts 1:6).

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 19:12-27.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is given in the story itself.

It concerns the kingdom of God and particularly what will happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The setting says that the parable was told in view of the common expectation of some people that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once (Luke 19:11).

Jesus’ purpose was to counteract some harmful views about the coming kingdom of God:

According to Matthew 8:11-12 and 21:42-44, the kingdom of God that he proclaimed was not confined to the one nation of Israel, but included all the nations of the world. Nowhere in this parable is there any hint of obtaining political freedom for the nation of Israel!

According to Luke 19, the outward manifestation of God’s kingdom in its final phase is not a matter of the immediate future. A considerable long period of time will pass before the glorious return of the king (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ). During that time the servants must put to work whatever their master has entrusted to them.

According to Matthew 25 and Luke 19 every servant should be faithful and diligent in the performance of his God-given duties. In the final judgement and the establishment of the kingdom of God in its final form as the new heaven and the new earth, faithfulness and diligence will be rewarded, while unfaithfulness and negligence will be punished. The kingdom of God is already present (Matthew 12:28) and we must already now exploit the responsibilities entrusted to us.

The primary explanation or application of the parable is contained in Luke 19:26, “I tell you to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.” At his second coming, Jesus Christ will settle accounts with all his servants. Like in the parable of the talents, the application consists of teaching the very important principle: Whoever exploits the abilities and opportunities entrusted to him and gains more in the process, will be rewarded. But whoever failed to exploit his abilities and opportunities and consequently gained nothing, will be punished. By neglecting to put to use what God has entrusted to us, we will lose everything that was originally entrusted to us. Only by putting talents and abilities to use, one will grow in spiritual riches!¹

The secondary explanation or application of the parable is contained in Luke 19:27. At his second coming, Jesus Christ will judge all his subjects (all people on earth). Whoever rejected the kingship of Jesus Christ over him will be punished severely. According to John 3:18,36 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, especially the rejection of the gospel (the good news about Jesus Christ) will be severely punished. Enemies, who do not want Jesus Christ to be King, deserve punishment (his wrath, rejection and punishment in hell). Every person who causes sin and does evil² will be weeded out of his kingdom and thrown into the fiery furnace (hell) (Matthew 13:40-42).

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

A nobleman receiving a kingship. This is a relevant detail, because it points to Jesus. Jesus was using the symbolical language of the parable to reveal that, after his death and resurrection, he would ascend to God the Father in heaven, where he would receive the kingship over the whole universe! He would receive this kingship as a reward for his accomplished work of salvation (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 5:1-14). As King of kings, Jesus Christ would sit at the right hand of God in heaven and he would rule the whole universe in the interest of the Church (Ephesians 1:20-23; Revelation 1:5).

He gave one mina to each of his ten servants. What is important is not how much each servant received, but the fact that each servant received the same amount, namely one mina! Jesus does not explain what he means by a mina. It definitely represents whatever Jesus Christ has entrusted to his servants between his first and second coming. In contrast to the parable of the talents the king rewards each of his faithful servants with exactly the same amount of money. This

¹ Whoever fails to make use of the opportunities to participate in a discipleship group, Bible study group or other church ministry, will eventually lose everything he has!

² Think of lotteries, gambling, corruption, (fraud), casino’s, producers and distributors of drugs, pornography, human slavery, lover boys, child slavery and child soldiers, etc. etc.

gives the impression that the servants are those subjects that have been entrusted with a specific task and that this task is the same task for each servant. It certainly symbolises something that Jesus entrusted to every one of his servants in the world. In the light of the context in which Jesus said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”, the mina could represent the task of proclaiming the gospel to the lost in the world and making them disciples. Nevertheless, because Jesus does not explain the meaning of the minas, it would be wrong to assume a particular meaning of the minas. The emphasis is therefore not on what was entrusted to his servants, but on how they put to work what was entrusted.

The assignment (task). This detail is relevant, because it points to the central point or main message of the parable. The nobleman ordered his servants, “Put this money to work until I come back.” Although one mina was much smaller than one talent, the emphasis in this story is not on the amount of money, but rather on what is done with the money. The money must be put to work right up to the time when the nobleman returns as the king! The people of God’s kingdom must put forth every effort to use whatever Jesus Christ has entrusted to them. They must not leave unused what has been entrusted to them. They must diligently perform their assigned task. If, for example, “the mina” represents the proclamation of the gospel, then the task is to obey the gospel oneself and to proclaim the gospel to the lost in the world. And if “the mina” represents the task of serving God in some function in society (for example, being a shopkeeper or doctor), then that entrusted task must be fulfilled faithfully and diligently.

Some subjects hated and rejected the nobleman, but he was nevertheless made king! In the parable of the talents Jesus only speaks of servants, but in the parable of the minas he also speaks of subjects (citizens) (Luke 19:14). This detail is relevant, because Jesus was ultimately referring to the attempts of the Jewish and Gentile leadership to frustrate his becoming the King of kings.³ The Jews made a complot to murder Jesus and the Romans actually crucified him (Acts 2:23). However, their attempts to stop him from becoming “the King of kings” failed (Revelation 1:5; 19:16). Jesus Christ received the kingship over the whole universe (Acts 2:24). Jesus Christ himself is “the stone which the builders rejected, but which became the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22-23; Matthew 21:42).

At the king’s return, he rewarded or punished his servants and subjects. The return of the nobleman, who had become king, symbolises the glorious return of Jesus Christ at his second coming. At the final judgement, he will reward his faithful servants in proportion to their faithfulness (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). They will be given an opportunity to render greater service in the new heaven and new earth.

In the final judgement, all people in the world (subjects) will be judged according to either their faith in Jesus Christ or their unbelief (or false belief in other gods and religions). They will be judged according to their works: what they had done with what was entrusted to them (Romans 2:6). The real meaning of this parable is that each person in the world must make the best possible use of whatever Jesus Christ has entrusted to him (cf. Ephesians 5:15-16), whether he acknowledges Jesus Christ or not. Also in the light of the context, people must eagerly make use of the gospel of salvation, which has been proclaimed to them.

The people standing by the king (verse 24). They are people in the story and not the people listening to the story. Also the person speaking in verse 26-27 is the king, not the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, what is said indicates the mind of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 13:41 they are the angels who execute the judgement of Jesus Christ.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (the central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the ten minas in Luke 19:11-27 teaches about “rewards in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of the parable is the following. “People must put forth every effort to make the best possible use of whatever Jesus Christ has entrusted to them. God will reward faithfulness and diligence, and he will punish unfaithfulness and negligence!” In the light of the context, the trust includes how one responds to Jesus Christ and the gospel. Instead of criticising Jesus for saving a former corrupt tax collector, every person should respond to Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save what is lost.

Unselfish service is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom serve by not keeping anything that Jesus Christ has entrusted to them for themselves. They put it to work and make every effort to multiply what has been entrusted to them. If the proclamation of the gospel has been entrusted to a

³ Think of the leaders in countries today who take all kinds of measures to hinder the spread of the gospel and to keep Christians out of their country. Their hatred for Jesus Christ and Christians often turns into persecution and even murder.

person, then he should follow in Jesus' footsteps and go out to seek and to save the lost. If it is another task, he should go out and make every effort to have influence in society and multiply the fruits of his accomplishments.

Jesus Christ promises that people, who accept him and his message (the Bible), will spiritually become richer! But he also warns that the people, who reject him and his message, will spiritually become poorer. Through neglecting their duty, they will eventually lose everything!

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach, compare to what the parable teaches?

The main messages of the parable of the workers in the vineyard, the parable of the talents and the parable of the ten minas are related to the second coming of Jesus Christ. All people (and certainly all Christians) should be ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ, when they will give an account of their stewardship of whatever Christ has entrusted to them.

However, each of these parables teaches an important but different truth as well:

(1) The parable of the workers in the vineyard.

Read Matthew 20:1-16. In this parable a landowner hired workers at different times of the day, but at the end of the day he gave them all exactly the same reward. Although the workers produced different amounts of work, in the end they all received exactly the same reward.

The parable teaches that God's rewards are not based on when God calls a person or how long the person has been a Christian. God graciously gives eternal life to everyone who comes to him, whether early or late in life. God graciously gives the same salvation to everyone who believes, no matter at what stage of his life he is converted (Luke 23:40-43)! The workers, who were hired at the end of the day, received the same reward as those who were hired in the beginning of the day, because they all worked faithfully and diligently for the time they were hired.

(2) The parable of the talents.

Read Matthew 25:14-30. In this parable a master gave a different amount of money to each of three servants, but at his return he rewarded their work with the same rewards, when it was discovered that both had doubled what was entrusted to them.

The parable teaches that God's rewards are not based on the servants' different degrees of success or results due to different abilities and different opportunities in life, but on the servants' faithfulness and diligence, no matter how many abilities and opportunities he has entrusted to each! God graciously rewards faithfulness and diligence. The servant with more talents and greater results will not receive a greater reward than a servant with fewer talents and fewer results, because both have been equally faithful.

(3) The parable of the ten minas.

Read Luke 19:11-27. In this parable the nobleman gave the same amount of money to each of ten servants, but at his return he rewarded their work with different rewards, when it was discovered that some had earned more than others.

The parable teaches that God's rewards are based on different degrees of the servants' faithfulness and diligence, given the same abilities and opportunities. There are different degrees of rewards for different degrees of faithfulness and diligence! The servant, who has greater faithfulness and diligence, will also be given a greater responsibility (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parables about rewards in the kingdom of God? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes.

(1) All people must know what God is like.

God will graciously reward each Christian at the final judgement.

However, all these rewards are given, not because Christians deserve them or have earned them, but because everything is based on God's love and grace. According to Ephesians 2:10, even "the works" that Christians do are based on God's grace!

(2) Christians must know what they should be like.

What is important is to serve God with the right attitude or spirit and to serve God faithfully and diligently:

The genuine people of God's kingdom avoid falling prey to the work-for-wages spirit with respect to spiritual matters⁴, and instead recognise God's sovereign right to reward the people he called with whatever reward he deems suitable.

The genuine people of God's kingdom are faithful and diligent with respect to the abilities and opportunities God has entrusted to them. God does not reward success or results as such, but faithfulness and diligence.

The genuine people of God's kingdom put forth every effort to make the most of what has been entrusted to them, that is, they are as faithful and as diligent as possible. God gives different rewards to different degrees of faithfulness and diligence.

(3) An important principle in God's kingdom.

“Whoever has, will be given more and he will have abundance. And whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him” (Matthew 25:29). By neglecting to put to use what God has entrusted to us, we will lose everything that was originally entrusted to us. But by putting to use what God has entrusted to us, we will grow spiritually and become richer!

⁴ That is what other religions teach: to go to Nirvana in Buddhism, to reach moksha in Hinduism, to be rewarded with paradise in Islam, etc.