

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.¹² He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.¹³ So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’

¹⁴ *“But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’*

¹⁵ *“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.*

¹⁶ *“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’*

¹⁷ *“ ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’*

¹⁸ *“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’*

¹⁹ *“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’*

²⁰ *“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth.*

²¹ *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.’*

²² *“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?’²³ Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’*

²⁴ *“Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’*

²⁵ *“ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’*

²⁶ *“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.²⁷ 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.’ ” (Luke 19:11-27)*

What are We Doing with our Time?

Did you see the report last week about the man who fell asleep at the wheel and plunged his car off the edge of a ravine in Utah? The car flipped over and he was trapped inside, probably for days. He was injured and he couldn’t get out. He knew that he was going to die. Do you know what he did with that time? He wrote love letters to his wife and his children. It was a very sad story. But it illustrates a point that lies at the heart of our gospel lesson for today: our time on this earth is short. How will we use it? Does the fact that we know that this life is coming to end affect the choices that we make? Or do we forget that there’s an end coming? Jesus told a parable to make the point this morning. His words really come down to a question: **what are we doing with our time?**

I.

How you use your time is often affected by where you see yourself going. I imagine that for that man in that car in Utah, a lot of things that had seemed very important no longer mattered. Seeing what was coming forced him to think about how he wanted to use whatever time he had left. I pray that none of us ever finds ourselves in his situation. But we do know what’s coming. **What are we doing with our time? Are we living in view of eternity?**

To teach us to do that, Jesus told this parable. A nobleman was about to go on a trip to become king of another country. Before he went, he called in ten of his servants and he gave them each a mina of silver to invest. What is a mina? It’s a weight of silver, probably about a pound and quarter. It’s a little difficult for us today to come up with a value for a mina. By weight, it would come out to around \$275, so it’s not a huge amount of money. But some ancient sources give the impression that it equaled a couple of months’ wages for a day laborer – a person at the very bottom of the scale. So maybe it would make sense for us to think in terms of a couple of thousand dollars.

The nobleman commanded, **“Put this money to work until I come back.”** Then Jesus tells us that the people in the distant country didn’t want him to become their king, but it happened anyway. Finally, the man came home. He called in these ten servants and asked them to report. The first man came in and his one mina had earned ten more. That’s a great return! The king praised this man and put him in charge of ten cities. The second came in and he had earned five minas, so he got five cities. But then came a third servant. He was afraid of the nobleman because this nobleman was a hard man, and he was accustomed to getting profit out of any situation. So he just kept the mina safe. And the nobleman was furious. He called him wicked and he even took away his mina and gave it to the man who had ten. Then he had those men who didn’t want him to be king executed in front of him.

What are we to make of this parable? Jesus is picturing our lives here. We Christians are the ten servants. God has given each of us a mina – our faith, his Word and every other blessing of this life. Like those men, we don’t know when our King is coming back. But we do have instructions from him to work while we wait. If our focus is on heaven, if our focus is on Jesus’ promise to return and what’s going to happen when he does, then we won’t be like the man who was paralyzed with fear. That happens to us here. God has been so good to us. He’s given us one blessing after another because he loves us. But too often, we fail to see those blessings as God’s investments in his kingdom. Instead, we see them as ours. We worry about losing the things we have here. My friends, God tells us again and again that this life is temporary. Nothing that we see here is going to last. And in the parable, God gave them men who earned a few thousand dollars rule over cities – tens of thousands of people. In the same way, eternal life is far more valuable than anything we have here.

How long will you live on this earth? How does that compare with eternity? Eternity is a tough concept to wrap our minds around. If you live ten thousand years, twenty thousand years, thirty thousand years in eternity, you still have just as much time as you had on the first day – because you will live forever. All the days of the longest life here are nothing compared to the time we will spend with Christ in heaven. If we are focused on eternity, then we are going to make different choices and have different attitudes about life here. But of course, that’s hard for us to do, isn’t it? None of us has ever seen heaven. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in this life that we don’t have time for the life to come. Sometimes, we get so focused on what we can see and hear and feel that we compromise our faith and make “practical” decisions that deny what God says because we have to deal with “real life” here.

The Bible says that faith is being certain of things we can’t see. We can’t see eternal life, yet faith grasps it and is sure of it and makes decisions in this life on the basis of God’s promise of eternal life in Christ. Every time we ignore those promises and get so caught up in what we can see that we don’t live for Christ, our faith comes up short. We sin. And in this parable, we see God’s attitude toward the sin and failures of his people. When we don’t live for him we deserve his wrath and his punishment forever.

That’s a scary thought, isn’t it? Don’t we all have to admit that we often fail to live in view of eternity? But Jesus didn’t intend for us to read this parable outside of its context. Do you know what comes before this story? The story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector who came to faith and changed his life. Right after this is the story of Palm Sunday. Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the head of a multitude of people singing his praises and announcing that the Savior King had come. He rode in to die and pay for all of our sins, for all the times and all the ways that we forgot that heaven is our real home, for all the times that we were so focused on this life that we failed to live for Christ. Jesus rode into Jerusalem to pay for every selfish and sinful thought and attitude of our hearts and every selfish and sinful choice we’ve ever made – the conscious ones and the unconscious ones. He died for all the sins of all the world. Three days later he rose. He rose to tell us all that sin is paid for. He rose to tell us that we are forgiven and we will live with him forever. That forgiveness is the heart of living in view of eternity. When God’s forgiveness owns our hearts, then our hearts are focused on Christ and what he promises us. Then we make every choice in view of God’s love and eternal life with him.

II.

Of course, all that happens now, before Judgment Day comes. Luke says that Jesus told this parable **“because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”** We do expect Jesus to return every day. That’s part of living in view of eternity. But for two thousand years, the church has woken up every morning knowing that Jesus could come back today. And yet, every day so far, he hasn’t come. So we also have to live every day as if we still have work to do here. **What are we doing with our time? Are we faithful in using God’s gifts?**

Jesus has invested in us and he has told us to use our time, our gifts, our financial and spiritual and personal resources to advance the kingdom of God. Now, we don't have to be the guy who brings a tenfold or even a fivefold increase. When the king reprimanded the unfaithful servant, he didn't say, "Why didn't you double or triple my money?" He said, **"Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?"**

Interest – that's all God is looking for. For years, we've put birthday money and money the kids have earned doing this or that odd job in a bank account. After six years of investment, they've earned pennies on their savings. God does not call us to go out and change the world. God does not call us to do something so spectacular that people will make movies about us. God calls us simply to invest what he has given us in the work of his church.

He calls us to bring an offering to church. He calls us to invest our time in teaching our children to know the Lord, in working with our fellow Christians in our congregation and in our schools. He calls us to be ready with an answer when someone asks us a spiritual question. He calls us to dig deep into his word, to come regularly to church and communion, to hear the gospel so that we are prepared to live lives that give glory to him. And that glory comes from the everyday things – teaching our children to live their faith, helping people who are in need, doing our work faithfully, treating people with love and kindness even when they don't deserve it. Those things give glory to God. Those things invite people to come and hear about Jesus.

Christ is very clear about the judgment for unfaithfulness. That's what this parable is picturing: Jesus gathering all people on Judgment Day. There are really three groups of people here. There are the faithful in his Church, those who heard his word and lived by it. There are the unfaithful, those who heard the word and received God's gifts, but gave nothing back. Then there are the unbelievers, those who didn't want the king to rule over them. If we are unfaithful, Jesus says, **"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."** We don't want to be the Christian that he rebukes like that on Judgment Day and obviously, we don't want to be the unbeliever whom Christ condemns to eternal hell.

So how do we become the one who is given more? It's very simple: repentance. We recognize our sin and our failure to live for Christ. And then we trust in our Savior who loved us and died for us. The beauty of what Jesus did is that it changes what God will say to us on Judgment Day. Sometimes, I think we picture Judgment Day as a day in which God will replay everything that we've ever done or said or thought or felt. And there's an element of truth to that. God does speak of the books being opened which record our lives. But the Bible is very clear on another point: for the believer, God will only record his faith and the life of Christ.

So if we have not been faithful up to this point, our solution is to flee to Jesus. Our refuge on Judgment Day is our Savior. In Christ, we become those who have and are given more. The truth is, we won't deserve the reward Jesus will give us. No matter how hard we try to serve God, our sin constantly gets in the way. It constantly messes up our best efforts and corrupts all that we say and do. But when we cling to Jesus, God gives us a reward that we could never deserve. He gives us life with him. He gives us a new and perfect world. He gives us Jesus' life on Judgment Day and we will not be humiliated. Our sins will not be replayed. We will be called holy and righteous.

That verdict gives us what we need today to change our lives. Knowing Jesus and his love leads us to use the time we have left to write love letters to our Savior by living a life of love and service here. That man who died in that car crash in Utah had an opportunity to focus on what really mattered in his life. He did the only thing he could think of to make good use of the hours he had left. He didn't know how long he would be there. But he did know how it had to end. Our lives here are temporary. They will end. Either Jesus will return or we will die. We don't know if either of those things will happen tomorrow or years from now. But we have this time as a gift from God. Live it in view of the promise that you will live with him forever. Use God's gifts for his purposes until you see him. Amen.