

“ENGAGE IN BUSINESS UNTIL I COME”

Luke 19:11–27

Key Verse: 19:13

“Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’”

Who is Jesus to you? Many people don't believe in him at all. But for some, it's still not so clear. Some see Jesus as their example, which is good. Some see him as the one who saved them from their sins, which is essential. Honestly, though, some who believe these things about Jesus still feel disconnected from him. Frankly, it's so easy to get engrossed in ourselves. In today's passage Jesus explains another aspect of who he is to us. He's our King. This is no outdated concept; we all need to be relating to Jesus as our King today. But what does that really mean in practice? How can we do it? It requires a radical shift in our worldview and focus. In today's parable of the ten minas he gives us the general idea, and if we accept it, we can find out how to work out the practical details. He's telling us that he's given each one of us an assignment. Did you know you have a personal assignment from Jesus? But what does he really want from us? What does he mean by “engage in business”? And what's really at the heart of working for him? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his words today.

Jesus has just shared his own life purpose: to seek and to save the lost (10). He wants all of us to taste his grace, repent of our sins, and learn his heart for the lost today. Now, with his twelve disciples and a multitude of others (19:37), he's back on his way to Jerusalem. The final leg of this journey is about 17 miles, leaving a deep valley and walking on a steep, winding road, high up into the mountains, and it'll take about six hours. It's not an easy trip, but everybody with him seems so excited. They've all been waiting for this for a long time. Verse 11 says what they're thinking, that when they get there, the kingdom of God is going to appear immediately. They think that, by some miracle of God, Jesus at last is going to be made king of Israel. And they'll get to be part of his kingdom.

Aware of their expectations, Jesus proceeds to tell a parable. Look at verse 12. “He said therefore, ‘A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.’” This doesn't make it sound like Jesus is going to be

crowned king any time soon. And it's not going to happen in Jerusalem, but "in a far country." But the people are so excited, they don't seem to catch his point. Anyway, he continues. Look at verse 13. "Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'" Basically, there are ten servants and ten minas, so it looks like each servant gets a mina. A mina was worth 100 days' wages. At minimum wage today, that would be \$12,000 per person. It's not a huge amount of money, but it's not trivial, either. These servants were not to use the money for themselves but engage in business with it. It's like seed money, just to get started. Also we should note what Jesus meant by "servants." They're not hired employees; in Greek, "servants" literally meant *owned* by someone and *bound* to him.

There's one more important aspect to the parable. Look at verse 14. "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" "This man" expresses contempt. It suggests it's going to be hard for him to become king. His citizens are going to play politics to try to stop him. We don't know why they hate him so much. But their urgent message doesn't change things. The nobleman receives his kingdom anyway (15).

This opening setup is an allegory for the gospel of Jesus. His own people are about to reject him as king. But just as planned, he'll go to the "far country" of heaven, receive his kingdom, and someday, like it or not, he'll "return" as king. Jesus has described several times that day's coming.¹ For those who believe in him, it's the *best news ever!* *Jesus is coming back!* Do you believe it? The haters, no matter how strong they seem, won't ever be able to stop God's plan for Jesus from coming true. But for the time being, his servants have to live and work in an environment that's hostile to their king.

In the rest of the parable Jesus describes what happens when the king comes back. Look at verse 15. "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." Some people are biased *against* business. They think it's too materialistic and greedy. Zacchaeus, despite his success, has been despised for this same reason. But Jesus used the concept of business *positively*, to teach something important about our relationship with him. And his illustration from business shows what's going to happen when

¹ 12:35–48; 13:22–30; 16:1–13; 17:22–37

he comes. He's going to call us to himself, and he'll be asking each of us some personal questions. Romans 14:12 says, "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God." This is a crucial part of our Christian faith. The New Testament mentions this day of reckoning so many times.² We can't skip it just because it makes us uncomfortable. Jesus our Savior loves us so much that he laid down his life for us. But he's also coming someday as our King and Lord, and no one is going to be exempt from giving an account to him.

In the parable, not all ten servants' interviews with the king are included; just the first three. Look at verse 16. "The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.'" This servant is so joyful! He's made a 1000% profit, from \$12K to \$120K! Was he just super lucky? No. It happened because he seems to have taken his master's words most seriously. He made his profit even in that hostile environment. In the parable, this servant is the ideal. But we should stop to think about why he was so successful. Was it because he was the most talented businessman? No. He's an example for us all of what it looks like to be loyal to our King Jesus. This man was *eager* to serve his king. He wanted to make a *profit* for his king to the maximum degree. He worked so wholeheartedly for him because he *loved* his king. And, he truly *believed* his king would be coming back.

Still, the point is a little vague. To really grasp it, we've also got to know what the mina represents. It's a monetary term, but it's definitely not money. And it can't be our unique gifts, because every servant gets the same mina. The mina seems to represent God's *grace*. Whoever we are, we all receive the same grace of forgiveness from Jesus. Only by his grace do we have the privilege of serving him. The mina also seems to represent life itself, *our one life*. What will we do with the grace we received? What will we do with the one lifetime we received? If we know and love Jesus as our King, by his grace we'll seek to serve him with everything we've got. If our hearts are filled with his grace, we won't have to be begged; we'll be looking for any and every possibility, any and every opportunity to serve him.

Apostle Paul was such a servant. He was always looking for opportunities to serve Jesus, not because he was trying to prove himself or outshine others, but because he loved his King so much. He used the phrase "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil.3:8). He was proud to introduce himself as "a

² e.g. Rom.2:5-11; 2 Cor.5:10; Heb.9:27

servant of Christ Jesus.”³ He wrote, “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service...” (1 Tim.1:12). Paul had such a sense of privilege to serve his King because of the grace that Jesus gave to *him*, the least apostle, the foremost sinner of all (1 Cor.15:9–10; 1 Tim.1:13–15). Because of this amazing grace, he wanted to bring about “the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rom.1:5). He wanted to bring praise to the glorious grace of Jesus (Eph1:6). He wanted this grace to extend to more and more people (2 Cor.4:15). Because his spiritual eyes were opened by this grace, he could see when “a wide door for effective work” had opened to him, even in the midst of “many adversaries” (1 Cor.16:9). He didn’t calculate; he just got to work for his King Jesus. In fact, he made it his ambition to share this good news of Jesus with all those who do not know him (Rom.15:20–21). He wrote, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). He even used his Roman imprisonment to help unbelievers to know Jesus and believers to become more bold for him (Phil.1:12–14). His one life, dedicated to his King Jesus, brought such a huge impact on the world, such a profit for God’s kingdom. Unlike most of us, Paul was a full-time single missionary. But his spirit to love and serve Jesus is a model of servanthship to our King, wherever we are, whatever we’re doing. We learn from Paul to find any way we can to spread the gospel of God’s grace. He wrote: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col.3:23–24).

So how does the king respond to the first servant? Look at verse 17. “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.’” The king rewards this servant so generously. He gives him jurisdiction over ten cities, which is far more than the profit he brought. It shows how gracious this king is to his servant. It also shows the beautiful relationship of love they have. And something else stands out here. The king says, “...because you have been faithful in a very little...” To some, the servant’s accomplishments may seem so great. But the king says here that it’s “very little.” Clearly, the point is not the amount; it’s about being “faithful.” Here, “faithful” basically means “reliable.” Why has this servant been so reliable? It’s because he’s been *loyal* to his king. It’s good to be loyal to the people through

³ Rom.1:1; 1 Cor.4:1; Gal.1:10; Phil.1:1;

whom we've received God's grace. But it's best to be most loyal to our King Jesus. It's not a self-centered duty; it's out of loyalty to him that we should be serving him faithfully. This is such a great conclusion to Jesus' teaching in Luke's Gospel on discipleship: Even "in a very little," *be faithful*. 1 Corinthians 4:1–2 says, "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." When he comes, will he find us faithful?

In verses 18–19 Jesus briefly mentions the second servant; by making five minas more, he's put in charge of five cities. The point here is, the king is not only gracious but also gives the right reward to the right person; the king is just. Then Jesus describes a third servant. Look at verses 20–21. "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 reap what you did not sow.'" What's wrong with this guy? Does he just lack any business sense? Is he just idle or lazy? His words reveal he doesn't have a good relationship with the king. He calls him a severe man and a taker. He says he's afraid. Afraid of what? Maybe not so much of punishment, but afraid of *losing*. He doesn't really understand the king's heart. And he thinks he's done well enough by returning the original investment intact. In fact, many would have spent it all; at least he didn't do that. He's kind of self-righteous about it.

How does the king respond? Look at verses 22–23. "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?'" What's the point here? Is the king just being demanding and angry? No, the point is, this servant didn't know how to think properly. He needs to know that he's a servant of the king. He should be trying to gain some profit for his king. He should be trying to do *something* for him. Even if the situation seems too bad, he should be looking for *some* opportunity, for some kind of gain, for his king. But with his negative attitude, he has no idea to do that.

Our King Jesus rewards not out of favoritism but based on a principle. Let's look at the end of his parable. Look at verse 24. "And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has ten minas.'" It looks like all the servants actually get to keep all their minas! But to the people there, this

seems so unfair. Look at verse 25. “And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’” Maybe they’re a little jealous. What does the king say? Look at verse 26. “I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Jesus taught this principle earlier (8:18). The point is that we should not take life and grace from him superficially and think we’ll be fine. Through the life and grace he gives, we need to come to know him, have a deeper relationship with him, and with that relationship get active serving our King. Otherwise, we may find in the end that what we thought we had is taken away.

Jesus concludes this parable on a frightening note. Look at verse 27. “But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.” For now, his enemies seem to have free reign to say and do whatever they please. But in the end, Jesus will show himself to be the real King and Judge. In response to him, no one can hide in neutrality or “the middle way.” We’ve either got to accept his grace and love and serve him wholeheartedly, or we’ll find ourselves rightly condemned and punished for rebelling against him.

Read verse 13 again. “Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’” May God help us know his grace, find ourselves as his servants, and learn to live with Jesus as my King. May God help us accept his words, “Engage in business until I come.” May we do our utmost with our lives to advance his gospel in this hostile world.