“The Good and Faithful Servant,” Luke 19:11-27 (Second Sunday of Easter, April 7, 2024)

**11**As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. **12**He said therefore, “A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. **13**Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Engage in business until I come.’ **14**But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ **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. **16**The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ **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.’ **18**And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ **19**And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’ **20**Then another came, saying, ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; **21**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.’ **22**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? **23**Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?’ **24**And he said to those who stood by, ‘Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.’ **25**And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten minas!’ **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. **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.’ ”

PRAY

This morning, we conclude our study of the gospel of Luke for the spring, and we’ve come to an appropriate point in the book to do so because our passage ends a long section in the gospel of Luke, one that began back in chapter nine. Jesus has for ten chapters been on the road to Jerusalem, headed to the cross. Our text for today ends in verse 27 of chapter nineteen; in verse 28 Jesus finally enters Jerusalem to begin the last week of his life. The last week of his life is what we will, Lord willing, study in the spring of 2025.

I’ve thoroughly enjoyed teaching through Luke this spring because this part of Luke is full of the parables of Jesus. I’ve found that when I teach on the parables, I don’t have to do much work to get you interested in them. All I must do is read them and it seems we all naturally give our attention a little more easily than we might some other Bible passages.

But I especially enjoy the parables ***in Luke*** because Luke goes out of his way to explain the parables, and today is no exception. We read in verse 11 that Jesus “proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they [the crowds] supposed ***that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately***.”

Jesus, by this point in his ministry, after three years of preaching and teaching and miracle-working, was the most famous man in Israel. Thousands of people followed him everywhere because they thought he was the Messiah. The Romans had controlled Israel for about a hundred years, but the crowds following thought Jesus was God’s anointed man would give the Jews back their country. They assumed that’s why he was on the way to Jerusalem where he would (to use a modern phrase) “drain the swamp” and restore the nation to the glory it had under Kings David and Solomon.

Jesus knows their excitement, knows their expectations but instead of telling the people ***when*** the kingdom of God would appear he tells this parable to demonstrate ***how*** his followers should live until it happens.

Of course, we know now that Jesus did not go to Jerusalem all those years ago to be made king, but to be killed. The last week of his life ended not with Jesus on a throne but on a cross. And two thousand years later we still don’t know ***when*** Jesus will return, though that hasn’t stopped many Christians from wasting lots of time trying to figure it out.

But we can be certain ***how we must live*** until he does. That’s what this parable, often called “the Parable of the Minas” is all about, and this parable teaches that followers of Jesus are called to one thing: ***be faithful.*** We are to be faithful the God who made us and to whom we belong.

I want to show you three things followers of Jesus need to know about faithfulness: *first, the problem of misunderstanding faithfulness.* *Second, the gracious secret of faithfulness.* *Third, the reward of faithfulness.*

First, the problem of misunderstanding faithfulness. Jesus tells a parable about a nobleman who is traveling far away to be made king. Before he leaves, he gathers ten servants, gives them each a mina (which represents about three months wages for a common laborer), and tells them to invest that money for him until he returns.

Remember: this is a parable. It’s a story told to illustrate a spiritual principle. Therefore, Jesus isn’t talking about something that actually happened. There was no nobleman who gave minas to his servants. The minas represent something to make a point. What was it?

In the context of this parable, I think it’s clear that a mina represents a life, the lives of these servants. As we apply this parable to us as Christians today, the question we need to ask ourselves is: ***are we faithful?*** In the parable, the nobleman represents Jesus, and the servants are his followers. Are those of us who call ourselves faithful to him with our lives? Put another way: ***is God getting a good return on his investment in us?***

If you are at all conscientious about following Jesus, if you take being a Christian seriously, your knee jerk response is: ***I’m not sure!*** Is God getting a good return on his investment in me?

Because we think, certainly I think, “You know, I can be pretty lazy. I waste a lot of time. I watch a lot of TV. I obsess over sports, and spend countless hours watching football, basketball, baseball. I’m embarrassed to even think about how much time I spend on my phone, on YouTube, Tic Toc, scrolling through Instagram. The internet has ruined my work ethic. When I read, I don’t read the Bible, I read other things that amount to the book equivalent of junk food. And even when I’m doing productive things like working or cleaning the house or cutting the grass, does that even count as being faithful to God? ***Is God getting a good return from his investment in me?*** I don’t know.”

And that automatic, knee jerk response leads to fear: ***the fear that I’m not faithful.*** The fear that I’m not one of the good servants, but the bad one. The servant with whom the master is angry.

In Matthew’s gospel there’s a parallel parable. There it’s called the parable of the talents. And about the lazy servant in that parable the master says, “And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 25:30.

It’s easy to read this parable and be afraid, afraid that if God is not pleased with his investment in me, Jesus will one day say to me what the master says in 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.”

Therefore, we read a parable like this, and we want to know, “How can I measure my faithfulness?” In other words, we ask, “How many people do I have to personally witness to and lead to Christ before God will consider me faithful? How many Bible studies must I teach before I’ll be considered faithful? How much money do I have to give away or how many children must I sponsor or tutor before God will say, ‘Yes, servant, finally, you’re faithful’”?

We tend to think if we don’t ***produce*** enough results with our lives***, Jesus will be angry with us.*** It’s all too easy to believe that Jesus loved us enough to die for us on the cross, but now on this side of the resurrection ***we have to earn it. We have to be faithful,*** and faithfulness means proving ourselves worthy to God ***by getting results.***

Do you remember the story of Martha and Mary? In Luke 10, we read about them: Martha and her sister (probably her younger sister) Mary. They both love Jesus, and they know Jesus loves them. They both want to serve him, and one day Jesus comes to their house. He begins to teach, and Mary sits at his feet, listening carefully.

But Martha says, “I must prove to Jesus how faithful I am. I have to produce results. He’s got to see what a good hostess I can be.” So, instead of providing a simple lunch for the disciples consisting of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, she is running around the house preparing a four-course meal. Martha’s pulling one thing out of the oven, putting something else in, placing a third dish on the island in her kitchen, refilling glasses, too busy to listen to anything Jesus says, ***and then she gets angry at Mary because she is just sitting there!*** We read that Martha is even gets short with Jesus. Martha could have just slipped behind Jesus while he taught, looked at Mary, and went [indicate]. But instead, she rebukes Jesus and says, “Tell my sister to help me!”

She basically says, “Jesus, I know you know all the secrets of the universe. I know every word that comes out of your mouth is more precious than diamonds, ***but don’t you see that the casseroles I’ve slaved over for you are burning?”***

Is that you? Do you think you’ve been saved by grace but now, this side of the cross, ***you’re living as if your salvation is all up to you? That you have to prove yourself to Jesus?*** If so, you’re probably like Martha, driving yourself and everyone around you crazy. ***But that’s misunderstanding faithfulness, and it’s a problem.***

*Second, the gracious secret of faithfulness.* There are ten servants, but we’re only told what three of them did with their minas. One servant got a one thousand percent return on his mina. The master gave him one, and he earned ten more. Another servant earned a five hundred percent return on his mina. The master gave him five, and he earned five more.

But here’s what I want you to see: ***the master is pleased with them both!*** The master does not come up to the second servant and say, “Five hundred percent return. Huh? Not great, but not terrible. But if you’d worked harder, you could have made what the first servant did.” No. ***He is pleased with them both.***

And I’m convinced that even the third servant, if he had simply put his mina in the bank and earned interest, five percent, seven percent while his lord was away, he would have been pleased.

Because truly the third servant’s problem was not that he didn’t make any money for his master. What was it? The servant says, “Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; **21**for ***I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man***.” Luke 19:20-21.

The third servant’s problem ***was not that he didn’t produce***; his problem was that he thought his lord was a severe man, a hard man, difficult to please.

Is that who you think our God is? Is he severe, hard, difficult to please? Can I let you in on a secret about our God? He’s not glaring down at you from heaven searching for things to criticize in your life. He’s not faultfinder, he’s not looking for evidence of how you don’t love him. ***That’s what we do with each other.*** That’s how we operate. In our relationships, we look for reasons to say, ‘You don’t care about me,’ and we want people to prove how faithful they are to us. It’s so easy when you’re married to get suspicious of your spouse and wonder, “Do I even cross this person’s mind anymore?” Friends do this to each other, parents and children do this with each other, certainly people who work together to do this to each other. The slightest little thing goes wrong in any of these relationships and immediately we’re on our guard asking, “Is this person really on my side or not? Do they care about me at all?” We don’t trust others, so we want people to prove themselves to us and see results.

But God is not asking you to prove yourself to him. He’s not suspicious of you. You know what God does? ***He’s pouring over your life looking for anything, even the smallest sign, of your faithfulness.*** Anything to praise you for. Anything to celebrate.

At one point Jesus says, “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” Matthew 10:42.

You know that means? That time you heard someone coughing in church and you walked over to the kitchen, grabbed a paper cup out of the pantry, went to the faucet, poured some water in, then took it back to the person, Jesus was up in heaven saying, “Yes! Yes! That’s it! You cared about that person! I am proud of you!”

Friends, Jesus is not hard to please. He is not up in heaven with arms crossed, tapping his foot, saying, “I better see some faithfulness down there on earth. They better show me they care.” That’s what we do to one another, ***but don’t you dare impute our motivations to Jesus.*** Jesus loves his people. He died for his people and, more than that, as Hebrews 7:25 says, he always lives to intercede for us. That means Jesus is cheering us on right now.

Every time you even try to pray, or read your Bible, or listen to a sermon, or tell someone, “I love you,” or serve, or try to have a hard conversation, every time you try to apologize, ***and*** every time you witness for Christ, start a Bible study, give your money away, or tutor a child, if you do it ***believing that Jesus is easy to please and he loves to reward his people***, you’re being faithful. That’s why Jesus says about himself, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30**For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

For those of us who tend to be Marthas (and I’m certainly one of them), we need to hear Jesus saying (as he does in Luke 10:41-42): “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, **42**but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” If you’ll sit feet of Jesus, believe he’s easy to please and that he loves to reward his people, ***you’ll be faithful, and Jesus is getting a good return on his investment.***

Now is anyone here thinking, “J.D., that sounds too good to be true”? I hope you all are, because until you’ve thought that I don’t think you’ve ever really understood the good news of Jesus Christ. It’s not just good news; it’s the best possible news you could ever hear. God loves you so much that he became a man in Jesus Christ to die in your place to forgive your sins, he opens your eyes through the Holy Spirit to see how much he loves you, and now all he wants you to do is trust him and you will be saved: saved in death and through life. There is no better news.

The world looks to results. The world wants to measure what you’ve accomplished to see what you’re worth. ***But God looks at the heart.*** That’s the gracious secret of faithfulness. The only people about whom Jesus will say, “These are my enemies, for they did not want me to rule over them,” are those who run from him because they think Jesus a severe man. They run from him, so they can’t receive his forgiveness.

Hebrews 11:6 says: “And without faith it is impossible to please him, ***for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him***.” If you see that God is easy to please and loves to reward his people, then no matter how little it seems you’ve produced on earth (even if it seems all you’ve done is put your mina in the bank and earned a little bit of interest), you’ve been faithful.

Third, the reward of faithfulness. Let’s read verses 15-19: “When he [the nobleman, who represents Jesus] 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. **16**The first came before him, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.’ **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***.’ **18**And the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your mina has made five minas.’ **19**And he said to him, ‘And you are to be over ***five cities***.’”

When he returned from the far country, the lord rewarded his faithful servants. He gave one ten cities to rule over and the other five cities. What does that mean?

I take it to mean that when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to usher in the kingdom age and reunite heaven and earth, he will gather all his servants and he will reward them ***according to their faith.***  He’s fully pleased with all Christians, but some of them will, because they more fully exercised their faith on earth, will receive more reward in heaven than the rest of us.

Now on earth, when some Christians seem to accrue more blessings than others, it often leads to jealousy. If one believer has more money or success than another believer, or if one believer gets married and her friend remains single, it can be hard for the Christian who goes without to rejoice in the blessings of another.

Will heaven be like that? Will rewards lead to jealousy there? No, they will not. Fifteen years ago, I read something Jonathan Edwards wrote on this subject back in December 1740. It’s my go-to resource when it comes to rewards in heaven.

He says that when Christians are faithful on earth, we are growing our souls’ capacity for heavenly joy. Our souls are like muscles. The more you exercise your muscles the more weight you can lift. Likewise, the more you exercise faith on earth the more joy your soul will be able to handle in heaven. Therefore, some will experience more joy in heaven than others. Yet there will be no jealousy. Why?

Edwards writes, “Every vessel [or soul] that is cast into the ocean of happiness [in heaven] is full, though some vessels [are] far larger than others; and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign throughout the whole society [because everyone, no matter the size of their soul, is filled with love, so there’s no room left in our hearts for jealousy] … this happiness of the saints shall never have any interruption. There will never be any [tarnish] to it; there never will come any cloud to obscure their light … The rivers of pleasure will not fail, the glory and love of God and of Christ will forever be the same … the saints shall not be weary of loving, and praising, and fearing, as the sun is never weary of shining.”

God does not judge us according to what we accomplish in this life. ***God judges the heart***. But if you do have a heart that trusts God, you will find that over the course of your life you’ll accomplish a lot. You’ll produce a five hundred percent or even a thousand percent return on God’s investment in you. ***It’s just that you’ll probably never know exactly when it’s happening.*** You’ll be producing and not realize it.

My favorite illustration of this from C.S. Lewis’ book, *The Great* Divorce, where Lewis imagines what it would be like for a man to take a tour of heaven. One of the things this man saw was a huge parade, with one woman in the middle who was being celebrated. The members of the parade, people, animals, and even angels, were dancing and throwing flowers before her, and the musicians played so magnificently that if you could hear their songs in our world, you’d never grow sick or old. Lewis write that the woman of honor wore joy like a garment, and she was so beautiful it hurt to look at her face.

The man asks his heavenly guide, “Who is this woman? She must have been someone important.” The guide said, “It’s someone you’ve never heard of. Her name on Earth was Sarah Smith. She’s one of the great ones. But remember that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things.”

The man asked, “Who are all these young men and women on each side of her?” “They are her sons and daughters.” The man said, “She must have had a very large family.” “Every young man or boy that met her became her son – even if all he did was help her with her groceries. Every girl that met her was her daughter.”

The man said, “That must be hard on their parents.” His guide replied, “No. There are those who steal other people’s children. But her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more. Few men looked on her without becoming, in a certain fashion, her lovers. But it was the kind of love that made them not less true, but truer, to their wives.”

Then the man said, “What are all these animals? A cat – two cats – dozens of cats! And all these dogs … why, I can’t count them. And the birds. And the horses.” “They are her beasts,” the guide replied. “Every beast or bird that came near her had its place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them.” The man said, “How could this be?” His guide said, “It is like when you throw a stone into a pool, and the waves spread out further and further … there is joy enough in the little finger of great saint such as yonder lady to waken all the dead things of the universe into life.”

Sarah Smith was so full of the love of God that she naturally produced results without even realizing she was doing it. It was just the fruit her faithful heart produced. God is easy to please and he loves to reward his people***, and the more you believe that the more results you will produce on earth and the greater your reward will be in heaven. But never mistake your results for the reason God loves you.*** God loves you because of Jesus Christ … full stop.

We’re going to take the Lord’s Supper now, and I invite you to take the bread and the cup to help you remember that your faithfulness is not the cause of God’s love for you, but that your faithfulness is a result of God’s love for you in Jesus Christ. PRAY