

OCCUPYING OURSELVES

¹¹ 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 they have 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.' "

You go to the doctor or dentist, or you go to the airport to fly some place. You have to wait until they call you to come and see the doctor or dentist or board the plane. What do you do while you wait? You could stare at the walls drooling. Or you can make yourself busy. I like to bring a book to read. Others watch the television or grab a magazine. I have seen women work on their knitting. Christ is coming back, soon. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. But we don't just sit here and stare while we wait. Jesus gives us some things to do to occupy our time.

I. The Lord is returning.

Luke 19 describes Jesus going to Jerusalem for the last time. The time is Passover and Jesus is near Jericho some 18 miles away. Passover is a very nationalistic time for the Jews. Passover celebrates their freedom from slavery in Egypt. They may be free of Egypt, but now Rome is ruling them, and they didn't like it. So when Jesus started talking about the Kingdom of God being near, they gathered around him. Maybe this is the day they will rid themselves of Rome.

Jesus noticed this patriotic furor. So he stopped and spoke this parable. Yes, he is establishing a new Kingdom, but not the one they were hoping for. He is coming to establish God's Kingdom, but it is not happening, yet. He is telling them to settle down.

In the parable, a nobleman had to travel to a distant country in order to be crowned king. The Jews understood that. Being under Roman rule, every Jewish king had to go to Rome and receive the right to rule from Caesar. In this parable, this nobleman is Jesus. Jesus came to earth to establish his kingdom. By his death on the cross, Christ won the right to rule over this kingdom. Shortly after that, Jesus ascended into heaven. When he returns, he will judge the world and establish his kingdom forever.

In the Lord's Prayer we ask that God's kingdom comes. Yes it comes now whenever there is a baptism or when communion is served or the message of Christ's forgiveness is preached. It is invisible in that it exists in the heart of every believer. But a time will come when Christ's kingdom will become visible in all its glory. That is what we are waiting for. But we don't just sit there staring into the skies. Jesus tells us there is plenty to do while we wait.

II. Until then, let's occupy ourselves with the Lord's work.

So, what are we suppose to do until his return? Well, the parable explains that. In it we see how people reacted while the nobleman was off to be crowned king. Some wicked people sent a delegation to stop the coronation. The Jews were familiar with that too. Remember Herod the Great, the king who tried to kill the infant Jesus by killing all the boys in Bethlehem? Well, after he died, his son, Archelaus, had to go to Rome to succeed him. The Jews sent a delegation to Rome, fifty individuals, to protest his

coronation. They sent a further eight thousand representatives to strengthen their protest, but to no avail. Archelaus was still crowned king.

In his day so many of his fellow Jews rejected him like those wicked citizens. They did not want him as their Messiah or King. This is where we find ourselves today. Jesus has ascended to heaven. He is, in a sense, being crowned. In his absence there are many people in the world who would stop Jesus becoming king, if they could. They reject him as their Lord. They reject his salvation. They want to rule over themselves. But they cannot keep Christ from being crowned king. The apostles lamented this when they quoted the psalm, ***“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.”*** The truth is, they plot in vain; they cannot stop him being crowned nor prevent him from returning as our King.

But not all reject Christ. The nobleman called together his ten servants and gave them each a mina to put to work. Look at how they used their minas. One got ten minas back with his one, and the other five. Now there are a couple things to note here. First, look at the humility of these two servants. They didn't say, "Look at what I did with your mina." Instead, they said, "Look at what your mina did." Secondly, their outcomes were different. One got a 1000% return, the other on 500%. Did this matter to the nobleman? No. The nobleman was pleased that both servants worked hard.

In contrast we have the third servant. Instead of letting his mina work, he wrapped it in a handkerchief and hid it. When the nobleman called him to account, he offered only excuses. The foolish servant was guilty of a sin of omission. Notice that this servant didn't do anything evil with his mina. He didn't gamble it away. He didn't use it on wild women and wine. His sin was he didn't use it. Look the good Samaritan. The priest and Levite didn't beat up the man, or kick him or rummage through his pockets. They did nothing. That was the sin. They ignored the man.

Friends, what is the mina the Lord has given you? Your mina includes the Bible and Baptism and Lord's Supper. Are you letting it work? Are you letting it grow your faith and the faith of your family? Are you letting it spread to others so they too may believe? Or do we find ourselves hiding it?

But your mina is more than God's Word; it includes every situation and relationship and gift God has given you. Luther tried to capture this with his table of duties. Your mina may be the fact that you are a husband or wife or parent or child; a worker or boss; student or teacher; friend, neighbor, even stranger; a citizen, church member, and American, a diaper to change, a neighbor in need, and all the gifts the Lord has given you. Your gift may be that of generosity, compassion, leadership, evangelism, whatever the Lord has given you.

But remember, your situation and gifts vary, and so will your outcomes. Some may produce more with their generosity or compassion than others. Some may introduce more to Christ than others. Some may be able to give more to church than others. The Lord gives you your "minas" as he sees fit, and he will bless your "mina" in different ways.

So, how is your mina doing? Are we letting it work? Or do we sometimes find ourselves wrapping it up and hiding it? We all certainly can come up with our excuses. I am too shy to talk about Christ. Plenty of others are helping the poor. God has given me too much to do. Instead of feeling sorry for yourself, or complaining about how much God has given you, thank God he is giving you something to occupy your time until he returns.

III. God rewards those who worked their minas.

God will return, and when he does, he will remember what people did in his absence. Those who rejected him, he will judge and condemn forever like the nobleman who executed the wicked citizens. You know, we shouldn't talk about how to get into heaven. Christ died for all. Heaven is a gift. Rather, we should talk about how one gets into hell. It happens when we reject Christ.

But Jesus will remember how our minas have been used. Whatever we do for one another, we do for Christ and he will remember even when we have long forgotten. But the Lord will know. Note how the servants were rewarded. They didn't receive riches or rest but more responsibility, ten cities or five cities. Don't be surprised if God rewards you with more minas and more to do. But we will also share in his glory in heaven. We are saved not because of what we have done. Rather, our Christian life simply reflects the salvation we have. Wouldn't it be something to have Jesus remind us of the good we have long forgotten and to thank us for it?

So the kingdom of God is ours. Christ paid for it; the deed is in our hand. But there is still work to be done. God reaches into his toolbox and picks up you and me and every believer. He gives us many things to do while we wait. May he find us busy with the tasks he has given us. Amen.