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Riverside Covenant Church
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Luke 19:11-27 – Put It To Work

When I turned 16, my parents bought me a car. It was a red 1989 Chrysler Lebaron convertible. It was awesome. It was turbo charged and had a black vinyl top. I have so many great stories with that car.

One time a bunch of my friends and I were swimming at my hometown public pool in the evening when it was closed. I should have probably had the sound booth stop the tape during that admission. Well when we were done swimming we were going to jump in my car and drive around town for a while with the top down. My friend Brian jumped into the back seat and someone else jumped into the passenger seat. They pull the door shut and I hear Brian say, “open the door. Open the door. Open the door!!!!!!.” It turns out when my friend pull the door shut from the passenger seat, Brian had his hand on the frame of the car right where the door latches. His hand was shut in the door when it latched. I will never forget his reaction when I think of that car.

One other story about the red car. The vinyl top did not have a real glass window in the back. It just had a plastic window. It actually zipped out so that the top could collapse when it was taken off. Well one day while I was in the big city at the mall, I went out to my car and the keys were locked in it. So I tried to stick anything I could find in the window to get the lock but nothing was working. Then I remembered that that the back window zipped out. So I climbed up on the trunk of the car and began to stick my hand in the back window of the top. I was trying to unzip the back window from the outside. Now you have to remember where I was at. I was in a mall parking lot, on the trunk of a car, with my hand stuck in the back window. And this guy walks by and I say, “hey, can you help me here, I need someone to help me hold this window steady.” The guy looks at me and literally starts to jog the other way. At first I thought that he was the bizarre one, but then I realized what it must have looked like as I was breaking into my car. And it got worse and worse as I climbed into the car through the back window and drove away.

I had a lot of fun with that car and I could tell you more and more stories. I will never forget, though, my parents telling me very clearly when they gave it to me that having the car come with added responsibility. You can have this car, it is yours to keep, but if you do not handle it appropriately then there will be consequences. We can always take the car away from you or worse you could die if you are

not attentive and careful. Thankfully nothing serious ever happened, except for one day when I did not come to a complete stop at a stop sign and someone in town called my parents to tell them. Small towns are awesome!

I will never forget my parents words to me, though. I understood that their gift to me came with responsibility and that part of my accepting of the car was that I would use it appropriately even when they were not around.

In our parable this morning Jesus is explaining to us that when we accept his forgiveness, when we enter into a relationship with him, we are accepting certain responsibilities too. Jesus says to accept the kingdom, or salvation, or His work in our lives and world, is to accept a trust. We are enlisted as an agent on behalf of the kingdom, and so enlisted we will be rewarded or judged in terms of our faithfulness to our task. We are judged based upon what we do with God-given responsibilities.

Read Luke 19:11-27.

There is a very similar parable to this one in Matthew 25, but they also have some very clear differences that lead many scholars to conclude that they are two different parables with similar themes. In Matthew each of the servants are given talents instead of minas and each are not given an equal number but in relation to their abilities.

I want to begin speaking specifically about this parable in terms of the history that is likely behind it. The parable seems to relate to this guy in many ways. (PIC)

His name is Herod Archelaus. There are several Herods in the Bible, but this one lived from about 23BC to 18AD. He ruled Samaria, Judea and Idumea from 4BC to 6AD. **(MAP)** He was an awful and cruel leader. Archelaus had a palace in Jericho, where Jesus likely told this parable on his way to Jerusalem, where he would make his triumphal entry. So it is possible, or even likely, that Jesus was exposed to evidences of Archelaus' former rule.

Here is the interesting part about Archelaus that is relevant to Jesus' parable. In 4BC, Archelaus' father, Herod the Great died. Herod the Great was the guy that built the second Jewish temple. And Archelaus'

brother was Herod Antipas, the Herod that killed John the Baptist and eventually Jesus. Anyway, after the death of his father, Herod the Great, Archelaus set out for Rome asking to be crowned king. No one served as king anywhere without Rome's permission. So people petitioned the emperor for the right to rule. Today, candidates for political office get elected by the people, but then they were approved by the emperor. When Archelaus goes to Rome, though, a group of people follow him to tell the emperor that Archelaus should not be king. They accused him of being an awful man and of monumental brutality. The emperor does appoint him a leader, but stops well short of making him king. The crowds fears were right though, and Archelaus is removed from office and exiled in 6AD because of his continued cruelty. Archelaus continues to be remembered first and foremost for his "slaughter" of those he feared would oppose him.

So what does this evil guy have to do with Jesus' parable? Well, Archelaus' story is very similar to the one Jesus tells. And since Jesus would have understood this history of Archelaus, many believe the facts of this parable are based upon his story.

The parable is about a guy that wants to be king and goes to a distant country to get the authority. But the parable says in verse 14 that, "**his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'**" In the parable, like the real story, the cruel guy is made king anyway.

It seems that the use of Archelaus' story is primarily useful because Jesus is drawing a parallel between how the Jews were resisting Jesus with how Archelaus was rejected by those that lobbied against. The Jews in Jesus' day were resisting Jesus, the Son of God, their Savior and Lord, as if he were Archelaus, an evil, brutal, and murderous leader.

This is primarily a side story though. The primary power in the parable comes in what the 3 servants do with what has been given to them. I think there are two clear messages that Jesus wants us to understand when examining this parable.

First, just like the the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, we can in our way resist the Messiah as if he were Archelaus. We can and often do find limitless reasons why no one, even Jesus, should rule over us. Even the sound of being ruled over makes us uncomfortable.

Having a humble and submissive heart is a choice. When I got my car when I turned 16, I had a choice. I could either ignore the leading of my parents with regard to curfew, and speed limits, and driving on ice, and using my blinkers and so on or I could submit to their will and do as they asked. I had a choice. I could have seen my parents as Archelaus, and understood them as having no desire for my good or I could have seen them as the loving and caring parents that were simply looking out for my best interests whether I saw it or not.

Our relationship with God is this type of choice. How do we see God? Is God someone that we just try to keep from getting angry at us? Is God wrathful and angry, just looking for a chance to strike us down with a lightning bolt? Or is God someone that can be wholly trusted, even when His leading and way of life make no sense? Is God perfectly good and deserving of our full submission and care.

Unless we recognize our own inabilities and God's true goodness we will never fully trust Him. An example of this that I have heard is **climbing a mountain** on a trail in a day. You can try to walk it on your own. Good luck though. If you don't slip off the side of the mountain because it is hard to maintain your balance at high elevations, you will be too tired to make it all the way up without resting. So your other option is to ride a donkey or horse. Now, at first this seems really scary, because how can you know you can trust a horse. You are no longer in control, but at the mercy of an animal. You might convince yourself otherwise, but the animal is by far the safest way to get up the mountain. They are steadier on four legs and they definitely have more strength and endurance to make the ascent.

That feeling of stepping up on a horse along a narrow path is the same feeling we often have when we give up control of our lives and submit to God. We are uneasy, unsure, even scared. But the reality is that we will not go anywhere useful until we trust. Until we make a decision to fall under God's authority in our lives.

I mentioned that I thought there were 2 clear messages in this passage. The first is that we should not resist God. **The second one is that salvation is not the end of our Christian journey, but the beginning.** When we commit our lives to Jesus, when we decide that the number one authority in our lives is going to be God, then we do receive God's forgiveness and salvation, but this is not all. We are also called to put what God has given us to good use.

This parable is told right before Jesus and his disciples are about to enter Jerusalem and it relates to the Kingdom of God. As Jesus and his disciples approach Jerusalem, they are excited and perhaps even giddy about what they think is about to go down. They probably expect Jesus to become truly become king of the Jews and reign with power and prestige. What they later discover is that the Kingdom did not fully come, but just the king. They got Jesus, but God's full reign when everything will be made right will come when Jesus returns. We see this in the parable. The king figure gives the minas and then leaves. It is when he returns that a reckoning is made. The parable illustrates an in between gap, a gap between Jesus' arrival and his return. And in this gap the disciples . . . and you and I have a responsibility. During this time we must remain faithful. To hear Jesus' message and to receive forgiveness is not only a privilege, but also a responsibility and people will ultimately be held accountable for what they do with it.

The verse we need to focus in on this morning is verse 13, “so he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. Put this money to work, he said, until I come back.” Put it to work!

I believe the greatest tragedy in our modern understanding of Christianity is that we often believe that our faith has more to do with what we should not do than with what we should be doing. We believe that Christianity only speaks in negative terms. We memorize a list of “don'ts.” Don't lie, don't steal, don't murder, don't lust, don't covet, don't be mean, don't swim for 30 minutes after you eat, don't, don't don't. But Jesus generally speaks in positive or affirmative terms. Jesus says, love God, love your neighbor, love your enemies, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, confess your sins, let your light shine. There is nothing wrong with the list of don'ts that we put together. It is generally a good thing not to do those things, but we still miss out on a lot if we simply don't do those things. They don't encourage us to do anything.

In Jesus' parable each of the servants are given the exact same thing, 10 minas. The presumption is that each of the servants are capable of taking care of the minas and putting them to work. The “man of noble birth” could have told them then, don't bury them, don't burn them, don't invest them in failing banks, and a whole host of other don'ts, but instead the servants are simply instructed to “put the money to work.”

The final servant, though, has a list of don'ts he has put together. He was so afraid of doing something wrong that he chooses to do nothing at all. He was so scared of screwing things up that he takes his 10

minas, wraps them in a cloth, and probably buries them, but at least just holds onto them. The good news is that he did not lose anything, but the bad news is that he did not gain anything. His minas did not grow.

This is too often our Christian lives. We have narrowed what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ down to a list of things we aren't supposed to do. And while we live very safe lives, we are often ineffective and unproductive for Christ. We have a responsibility not to be safe, but to put what God has given us to good use. We have memorized the sins of commission, but we regularly neglect the sins of omission. What are we choosing not to do that God wants us to do?

Here is a profound statement to remember this morning. God grows things. God grows things. If our faith is a seed, what we often do is protect that seed from a bunch of don't's. Maybe we stick it in safe deposit box at the bank to keep it hidden, or we put it in our pocket to make sure it is with us at all times, maybe we stick it under our pillow at night to keep it safe from thieves, we might wrap it in duct tape to protect it from falls. All good ideas. They all keep the seed from being destroyed. But the seed will never grow. It is stuck in neutral.

When God gives us forgiveness or eternal life or any of the countless other things he provides, they are not given to us to protect and hide and build fortresses around. They are given to us so that they might grow. In fact, we have a responsibility not to inhibit their growth. If we simply get out of the way, plant our seed in fertile soil, water it, make sure it has light . . . it will grow.

The third servant hid and protected his minas to such an extent he did not even earn interest on them. He did nothing with them. Not only was there no action, there was a shielding from its natural growth potential.

When we enter into a trust with the God of the universe and He says we are forgiven of all our sins, we agree to be his agent, his slave, co-worker in the world. We have a responsibility then to take the necessary actions with what he has given us. Neutral does not cut it.

One last thing that I want to discuss is verse 27. It is startlingly harsh and doesn't sound like it could come from the Jesus we know. It is important to remember that this line occurs in the context of a story. It is not intended to describe judgment, but to emphasize its seriousness. For instance, I might have told

friends in high school, if I am not home by curfew, my parents will kill me. I did not actually mean that they would kill me, but wanted to emphasize the seriousness of the judgment that would take place. Jesus' harsh language is intended to shock so that people take the warning seriously. Ultimately, Jesus is the one slaughtered and readers of this Gospel knew this as they read the story.

References consulted:

Snodgrass, Klyne R. Stories of Intent. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.