Put this money to work

Luke 19:11-27

Key verse Luke 19:17 ‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

Last week, we learned about Jesus who invited himself over to Zacchaeus’ house. No doubt that Zacchaeus was a terribly evil man. However, even Zacchaeus had a spiritual thirst and climbed up a sycamore-fig tree to see who Jesus was. Jesus called him by his name, which means “purity” and “innocence”. His heart was filled with joy. His joy came from God’s love for him. Even though he was a terrible sinner, God did not abandoned him. God was mindful of the humble state of Zacchaeus. God set him free from greed for money and made him a son of Abraham. Out of joy and thankfulness, he repented. “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus continues his teaching at Zacchaeus’ house. Jesus tells the Parable of the Ten Minas. Definitely, Zacchaeus must have listened to this parable together with Jesus’ disciples. This parable was given to not only his disciples but also especially to Zacchaeus.

Jesus was near Jerusalem and the people expected that Jesus would establish the kingdom of God right after his entrance to Jerusalem. However, God’s time schedule was so much different from that of the people. First, he had to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and rise from the dead on the third day and ascend to Heaven. He promised that he would come back to us on the cloud as he ascent to Heaven. His second coming is the death of death and the universal restoration of the kingdom of God. We have been eagerly waiting for His Return. The parable teaches what we should do while waiting for His return.

Now, let’s take a look at the parable closer. Let’s read verses 12, 14 and 15a**. “He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. “But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, “We don’t want this man to be our king.” “He was made king, however, and returned home.”**

To people hearing this parable, it was not just a story; it referenced their history. Just before his death in 4 B.C., King Herod had appointed his son Archelaus to succeed him as king. However, Archelaus was a cruel man, and was not popular with the people. So he went to Rome to have his kingship affirmed by the Emperor. When he did, the Jews sent a delegation after him, and they argued strongly against his appointment. In spite of their bitter protests, Archelaus was made king. This event proclaimed Caesar’s sovereign power to appoint the Jewish king, regardless of the opposition. Here the noble man is Jesus. God already affirmed his kingship. **Philippians 2:9-11 says, “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** He will return to us with his mighty kingship! Our belief of His Return makes us to live a life of faith. Without this belief, we cannot live a holy and righteous life.

Let’s read verse 13 together. **“So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’”** The master had many servants. He carefully chose ten of them. He gave one mina to each of them and said, “Put this money to work!”

If I were one of them, I would not be pleased with this task. As a sinful man, I don’t want to take a responsibility but avoid it if possible. And the timing was very awkward. Do you know the term, “lame duck”? Even if you are a US president like Obama, as your term approaches the end, people do not help you out. At that time of his departure, even it was not sure that he would be appointed to be a king. Many people hated him so he could not have made himself appointed. He might be assassinated on the way to the distant country. Then, why should I listen to him? Those who love the master and believe that he will return will obey him.

On the other hand, the money they received was not so much. One mina is a three-month wage, equivalent to $ 10,000. Can you start a business with $10,000? You can buy one third of a mini van for your business, if you pay tax with your own pocket money. One mina is not so small money, but not enough money for business.

We can see that the reason why he gave the minas to his servants is to see which of them are faithful and trust-worthy. To test someone, usually we give a small task to the person. If the guy does a good job, we give a little bigger task. If the person does a good job again, then he gains our recognitions. If your boss or prof gives a small task, don’t ignore it but do your best!

Finally, the new king return home and sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. Jesus will come back for sure! Do you believe that on December you will have a couple of final exams? Do you believe that in several years you will turn thirty, forty and fifty? Likewise, Jesus will come soon for sure even though his coming seems to be late. Ezra’s front teeth got removed when he was one year old and he got brand new teeth last year. It took five years! Whenever I checked his gum, there was no front tooth. One year passed, two year passed, three year passed but still there was no tooth. X-ray film tried to comfort me that there is a tooth beneath gum but I still had some worry that he might live without the front teeth for his life-time. Finally, last year his new front teeth came out. For a new tooth, I waited for 5 years! It helped me to believe that Jesus would come someday like Ezra’s teeth. When Jesus comes again, he will find out what we did on earth. I am not trying to threaten you but I am telling the truth.

Let’s read verses 16 and 17 together. **“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ “’Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.”** Wow, the first servant made 1000% profit. The king was very happy with the servant and gave him a great praise! “Well done, my good servant!” Have you ever won such a great praise from someone? From your teacher, from your friend, from your boss, from your parents, or from your wife? You did your best. You gave your heart. You spent all money. You spent all your youth. You spent countless sleepless night. And after that, if you hear a great praise and receive a great recognition from someone who is very important to you, you are truly a satisfied man ever.

The king did not touch the money the first servant made at all. The king was not interested in the money at all. Instead, he gave him ten cities in charge. The servant made $100,000 but the king gave him 10 cities! He was faithful with a small thing but the king’s reward was so amazing! God gave us many seemingly small tasks. God gave families to take care, Bible students to teach and love. God gave us a church office to clean. God gave us a singalong PPT pages to turn. God gave friends to be happy with and cry together. Don’t ignore small things! God cares small things so much.

The second servant made 500% profit and the king gave five cities to take care of. Even though in this parable, we can’t find the king’s praise of the second servant, the king should have praised him too. In Matthew 25, in the parable of the Bags of Gold, the master gives the same praise to each faithful servant regardless of the amount of money they made. **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”**

Now, let’s think about “mina” and “put this money to work”! We may understand “mina” as our talents, resources or our time or money. Here, I suggest that we can interpret “mina” as our new life in Jesus which is characterized by joy, thankfulness and hope which can be found in the changed life of Christians. As we see from Zacchaeus, if a man or a woman meets Jesus as the Savior and Life Giver personally, the person becomes full of joy and thankfulness for God, which is a new life in Jesus.

When we receive a new life, everything is beautiful. We can forgive people we used to hate. We become generous to the poor and people we know. We smile and sing a song all the time. We become courageous and wise to preach Jesus to unbelieving people. We teach Bible and serve God’s church. Living a life characterized by love, joy and faith is putting your new life to work. We might say with great conviction, “I am a new creation in Jesus!”

However, Jesus does not come back in one or two year after we believe in Jesus. Then we might have a chance to lose the overwhelming moment of salvation. Then, we become fatalistic, powerless or grumpy. Serving people becomes a heavy burden to us. That’s why we need a spiritual struggle to keep our love for Jesus burning up. Sometimes I meet people of God through books and YouTube video clips. Their love for Jesus make me ashamed and burn my heart again. I see that people who love Jesus is a great hope, a great challenge and a great joy.

Now, another servant came out before the king. He said, “Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 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.” This servant misunderstood his master completely. He thought that his master is like a very cruel capitalist who exploits a laborer’s toil. He wished that his master would have not come back. As a sign of disobedience, he kept the mina in a piece of cloth. The master judged him with his own words. If he was afraid of his hard master, he should have put the money on deposit so that the master could have collected it with interest. The master took the mina from him and gave it to the first servant who already had 10 minas. The master said, “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.” The economic phenomenon that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer is true for the spiritual world. Those who seek God and are happy with him get a closer intimacy with God and live a rich and joyful life. God exalts the humble and makes the proud ashamed. This is a spiritual principle. There are not so many people who truly seek God so we think that our coldness and indifference toward God and his people is normal. This is not normal. This is abnormal. I pray that we may get richer and richer in Jesus through our love and devotion to God and his people.

I want to share my story with you. In fourth year in my college, my Bible teacher asked me to join a tap dance team for Christmas celebration. I said, “Yes!” thinking that it would be fun. I had to practice it for one month and the period was overlapped with the final exam period. I had only one hour for my study every day. Amazingly God gave me peace and concentration. At 5 pm, I closed my book and took a subway for one hour to get the practice place. I enjoyed the tap dance practice and went back home midnight. When I took off my shoes, my feet smelled like a rotten soy bean source. I repeated this for one month. On the day of celebration, my dancing team prayed together right before the performance. Suddenly, I saw a vision. A very bright light shone on me and God said to me, “Peter, I accepted your heart!” It was really warm and comforting voice. Actually, it was not easy for me to practice a tap dancing for one month, when was the most important time in my college life. I was so joyful that God had been watching me. It was the most satisfying moment in my life.

However, I find myself that I lost my joy, thankfulness and trust of God so much. I became very critical and proud. While preparing this message, God showed me one word very clearly. It is “Joy”. I was a terrible sinner but God found me, called me and saved me. God’s grace upon me is higher than any mountain. God’s grace upon us is wonderful and amazing. We have a new life characterized by joy and thankfulness which comes from God. With this life, with this mina, what are we going to do while waiting for Jesus’ return? Let’s put our new life to work! I pray that everyone may hear Jesus’ praise “Well done, my good servant!”