

‘END TIME’ PROMISES FROM GOD, #2

“I PROMISE . . . To everyone who has, more will be given.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are fast approaching the end of calendar year 2013. At midnight on December 31, just 7 ½ weeks from today, the Year of our Lord 2013 will end and the Year of our Lord 2014 will begin. Not only are we approaching the end of the calendar year, we are also approaching the end of the Church Year. In 2013, the Church Year is ending exactly one month before the calendar year. New Year’s day for the Church Year is December 1st, exactly one month before January 1st, New Year’s Day for the calendar year.

So that puts us in the final month of the Church Year, a four week season appropriately called the Season of End Time. During the Season of End Time our readings and hymns and sermons deal with issues we face at the end of time, such as the Last Day, the end of time, Judgment Day, the resurrection of all people who have ever lived, the new heavens and the new earth. We are connecting the four Sundays of End Time under the theme “I Promise . . .” Each week we are preaching about a promise of God recorded in the Gospel lesson of the day. Last week we heard the promise, “The truth will set you free,” certainly an appropriate promise for our celebration of the Reformation.

Today’s promise from God is really a promise within a promise. From verse 26 of Luke 19 we read:

“. . . I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given . . .”

To everyone who has, more will be given but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.

How politically incorrect can Jesus get? Mention this promise to most people in today’s society and you will get the same response, “That’s not fair!” “It’s not fair if some have more than others, to begin with, and it’s really not fair if those who have more get even more yet, and those who have little to nothing get everything taken away.” It’s becoming popular for politicians, nowadays to make the “Robin Hood” promise to take from the rich and give to the poor, or at the very least to make the rich pay their “fair share” so that more can be given to those with less. “*To everyone who has, more will be given,*” how is this a fair promise?

Before we look at the specifics, let me remind you of what you just heard in the second reading for today from 2 Thessalonians 1. ⁵ *All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right . . .* ⁶ *God is just:* God is holy and just. He is the embodiment of what is holy and just. It is He who determines what is right and what is just and what is fair, and he’s always right. When 21st century American societal standards differ from God’s Word in the determination of what is just and fair, it’s the 21st century American societal standards that are wrong, not God’s Word.

But let’s take a look at the specifics of God’s promise. Actually, today’s promise is really a promise, within a promise, within a parable, the Parable of the Ten Minas. Jesus uses this parable to give us a picture of Judgment Day. He says that there once was a man of noble birth who was going away to a distant country to be appointed king, and then he was going to return.

In this parable, Jesus is talking about himself. He is the one of noble birth, the Son of God. After his death and resurrection he goes away to a distant country, that is, he ascends into heaven. There he is appointed as king over all the earth. (Ephesians 1:20-22). Sometime after that, Jesus plans to return. That's Judgment Day, and that's the overriding promise. Jesus has promised that he will return to this earth one more time, on the Last Day, Judgment Day. And the promise within this promise: when he returns, there will be punishments for some people and rewards for others. *To everyone who has, more will be given but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.*

One group of people that Jesus will find when he returns on Judgment Day will be the hardened unbelievers, people who opposed Jesus and worked against the spread of the gospel. In the parable Jesus describes how the man of noble birth had people who opposed him, subjects who hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

There were people who opposed Jesus during the days of his ministry here on earth. Some of his greatest opposition came from the religious leaders of Jesus' day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We read in John 11 that the chief priests & the Pharisees had a meeting about Jesus. Their conclusion, verse 53, *So from that day on they plotted to take his life.* There were entire towns that rejected Jesus and his message, Korazin and Bethsaida for instance. When the Roman governor Pontius Pilate gave the angry Good Friday mob the choice between the criminal Barabbas and Jesus they rejected Jesus with the cry, "Crucify him!"

There are many people today who say, "I don't want Jesus to be my king. I'm in charge of my own life, not Jesus." They are their own boss. They are the captain of their own ship. These people get along just fine without God and without church, and without religion. Another group of people who don't want Jesus to be their king are people who belong to non-Christian religions. There are many non-Christian religions out there. These people say, in one way or another, "Jesus is not God," or "Jesus is not equal to God," or they have other deities other than the Triune God. Then there are those people today who openly oppose Jesus and work against the spread of the Gospel. They belong to groups like the Freedom From Religion Foundation or the American Atheists. And there are people who openly oppose Jesus and the spread of the Gospel in a more subtle way. They call themselves 'theologians' and 'Bible scholars.' They teach at major Universities and Seminaries. Yet they work to undermine the authority of Scripture and they work to create doubts about the truth of the Bible in the minds of believers. They not only reject Jesus as their king, they are influencing countless others to do the same.

When Jesus returns on Judgment Day, there will be punishment. That's what Jesus describes in verse 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."* On Judgment Day Jesus will turn over to punishment all those who reject him as God and Savior. Too many people today say, "That can't be true. God is too loving to punish people." They believe that God is a kindly, slightly-senile old man who, on Judgment Day, will smile, ask everybody if they tried real hard, wink at whatever massive shortcomings their service may have included, then take everybody for ice cream.

But the reality is this, God is not only a God of love, he is also a God of holiness and justice. And because God is holy and just, he hates sin and he punishes sin. That's what a holy and just God does. Today's Epistle lesson from Thessalonians told us the very same thing, when it told about how Jesus will punish, with everlasting destruction, those who reject his Gospel. On Judgment Day, Jesus will shut them out from the presence of God forever. That is the fate of those who reject Christ outright during their lives on this earth.

In the parable Jesus describes how the man of noble birth gave a “mina” to each of his servants. A mina was a unit of money worth about three month’s wages. “While I am gone,” he told his servants, “put this mina to work.” Once again, Jesus is describing himself. Before he left this planet, what did Jesus do? He gave to us, his followers, the Gospel, the Word of God. That’s our mina. Jesus is not talking about talents or abilities or material wealth or spiritual gifts. Those are not given to us equally. The Gospel is. The same Gospel is given to everyone. Everyone gets one mina. And Jesus says to us, “While I am gone, put this Gospel to work. Use the Word, until I return.”

But look at what one of the servants did with his mina. He wrapped up the mina in a cloth, and hid it away. When the master returned and called for an accounting, the servant tried to point to the master as the one who was at fault rather than himself. He hid the mina because, as he told the king, 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.* The servant described the master as a hard man meaning he was not generous but stingy. Yet, when you look at the mina that he gave each servant, you see the very opposite. When the master left, he gave the servant who didn’t deserve a thing, three month’s wages as a gift. Yet, this servant came before the master and said, “You are a hard man.”

Over the centuries, there have been those who were given the clear Gospel message. But they couldn’t believe that salvation was as simple as the Bible says, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.*” (Acts 16:31). “We must have to do something to earn our salvation. That only makes sense.” But those who forsake the Gospel, who bury it in the background, and attempt to earn their salvation by their own merits find out that it is a hard task. It is an impossible task. “How will I know if I’ve done enough?” “How can I possibly live up to God’s standard of perfection?” “This is a hard, demanding God!”

What is going to be the result on Judgment Day? 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?’* “I will judge you by your own words,” the master said. “You call me a hard man. You are going to face hard punishment. You are going to see not my hardness but the hardness of your own heart.” ²³ *Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’* But the servant did not do one thing with the mina.

So the master commanded those standing by to take away his mina and give it to the others. When the others question the fairness of this act, the master said, ²⁶ *‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.’* The servant had hardened his heart. He did not see the generosity of this king. He did not see any value in the mina. So that little bit he had, which he didn’t think was worth much at all, was taken away. On the Last Day those who don’t have faith, have only earthly blessings, and those earthly blessings will be taken away. Without the gift of faith, no matter how much earthly wealth they accumulated, they had less than every believer. Without the gift of faith, they end up with no blessings at all, only condemnation.

God has given each believer the gift of the Gospel and the gift of faith to believe it. That makes us believers spiritually wealthier than anyone else in the world. When we die, through faith in Jesus we inherit eternal life in a place with no sorrow or sadness or suffering, only eternal joys. That’s God’s promise to you. “. . . to everyone who has, (That’s believers.) more will be given.” (Eternal life.)

But this parable also tells us that God wants you, his servant, to put the Gospel to work in your life until Jesus returns. Use it, Jesus says. Read it. Study it. Contemplate it. Live it. Share it. Put the Gospel to work in your life. Easy to say but not so easy to do. It's easier to wrap up the Gospel in a cloth and put the Word of God off to the side. It's easier to make excuses like, "I don't have time to study Scripture" or "The Bible is too hard to read" or "I was afraid to share the Word of God because I might not say things right." These excuses sound just like those the servant made in Jesus' parable. And look what happened to him.

It is God's plan that believers put the Gospel to work in their lives. As you hear this, maybe there are alarms going off in your head. We all can look back on our lives and say, "There have been times when I haven't really been all that faithful in my use of the Word of God. I've made excuses. I've 'wrapped up in the Gospel message in a cloth' and put it off to the side." The story Jesus tells this morning may cause you to ask yourself, "Will I be punished for this on Judgment Day?" If you are an honest believer, it's not uncommon to feel a sense of guilt when we talk about how we've fallen short of God's standards. We all know what we deserve on Judgment Day, and that's punishment. But the good news is that on Judgment Day, Jesus won't treat you as your sins deserve. He won't punish you, even though he has every right to. Instead, he will reward you, the believer in Christ. He will bless you with eternal life.

How can that be? It is true that God is holy and just. But he is also loving, and forgiving. Remember where Jesus was heading, when he told this parable. He was on his way to Jerusalem to satisfy the demands of God's justice and holiness. God had to exact punishment for the sins of the world. Jesus satisfied God's justice by allowing the Heavenly Father to punish him for the sins of the world. That's why he gave himself up to death on the cross. By that death God's justice was satisfied, and now God is loving and forgiving to all who believe in Jesus. That's why believers do not fear Judgment Day. Through faith, we look forward only to the increased blessings of heaven.

In this parable Jesus encourages believers to put the Gospel message to work in our lives. There is a lesson to be learned from the two faithful servants who invested their minas wisely. ¹⁶ *"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' . . .* ¹⁸ *"The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'* Neither one used the word "I". They both said, YOUR MINA has earned ten more. YOUR MINA has earned five more. They give credit to the MINA, not to themselves. The Gospel has power in and of itself. It is not dependant on the believer for its increase. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because IT is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."*

As you put the Gospel to work in your life, as you study it for yourself and share it with others, that Gospel will "make gains" in your life. Isaiah 55:11 . . . *so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to strengthen your faith. As your faith increases you will find the strength and the desire to do God's will and live a more and more God-pleasing life. Some may hear the Gospel for the first time from your witness to them. Others may see your Christian life and perhaps be drawn to Christ themselves. It is our privilege to live the Gospel, the Gospel itself is responsible for any increase in God's kingdom.

The promise within a promise within a parable is comforting to us believers. One day Christ will come in glory to judge the world. You have the blessings of salvation through faith in Jesus now. You will have an eternity of bliss with God forever. *To everyone who has, more will be given.* . . and that's a promise from God to you. Amen.