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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

August 25, 2013

The Parable of the Minas

Luke 19:11-27

Prayer: *Father God, I do thank you and praise you for the grace that you have given us abundantly. I thank you for this church. I thank you for calling each of us together as one corporate body, and again, I just -- I praise you for that gift, I praise you for the gift of your word, I praise you that we can open it and we can find your truth within it. I acknowledge, Lord, without your Holy Spirit's power it is a futile exercise. And so this morning, Lord, as we open up your book again, I pray that we would have the presence and the power of your Holy Spirit, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We have been looking at the biblical concept of stewardship. And I said last time that born again believers in Jesus Christ who know that they have been ransomed by the blood of the perfect Son of God who died in their place are stewards. These are people who know that they are new creatures. They are temples of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who*

does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. You see, when God lives in us, he changes our thoughts, he changes our drives, our appetites, our passion. Our new passion becomes the kingdom of God. Stewardship is really just a measure of that passion. A steward is typically just a person who manages somebody else's property. And if we own the kingdom of God and if it owns us, well then we are passionate about the property that we are given to manage. We think, we plan, and we act like someone excited about the opportunities to steward well those resources.

Now, the last two weeks we spent looking at the parable of the faithful steward in Matthew 25 for how a steward thinks; how his mind works. We said he is faithful, he is loyal, and he is joyful. We also looked in Luke 16, the parable of the shrewd steward for how a steward plans, and we saw that he redeems his time, he restores God's glory, and he reserves new relationships in the future with the resources that he's been given today.

Well this morning, I want to concentrate on that third quality of a steward. We want to look at the parable of the minas in Luke 19 for how a steward acts, how he uses today's resources to secure tomorrow's treasure. And for that we're going to go to yet another story that Jesus tells us about stewardship. This one is in Luke 19:11-27. Let me read it to you. It says: *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. He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' 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. The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' 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.' And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; 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.' 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? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to

the one who has ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' '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. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'"

Now at first glance, this appears to be almost the same story we saw a few weeks ago, but there are some very critical differences. And once again, we need to know some context, we need to know a little bit of history to make story -- to make the story make sense. It's similar to the story in Matthew 25 of the talents in that, you know, remember that one, one was given five talents, another one was given two, and another one; and that story, they're given by a master and the master leaves for a long time and then he returns and he demands an accounting. Well, these two stories are similar but there are strong differences as well in time and in place and in circumstance, and it is really a crucial difference.

So first we have to understand the time frame in which Jesus spoke this story. It is the beginning of the end for Jesus. He has lived out his faultless life. He is preparing to be our perfect substitute by exchanging his perfection for our sin at the cross, and he spent three years now in public ministry training his disciples. Secondly, we have to understand the place. Jesus was

now outside Jerusalem actively on his way to what would be his execution. Our text says in Luke 19:11: *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.* You see, at this point Jesus is near the peak of his popularity. He's just left the home of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who is now marvelously saved, and he's making his way up to Jerusalem for the Passover, you know, the celebration of ancient Israel commemorating the angel of death passing over those households who were protected by the blood of the lamb. Well, Jesus was to become that lamb and he was to offer up the protection of his own blood for us.

Now, the setting of the parable was that Jesus, he's giving last-minute instructions to the crowd that is following him. It's a generic form of instruction intended for all who were following after him, and guess what was important to him? Guess what he talked about? He talked about stewardship. And when you look very carefully, you will see the story Jesus tells this time is actually very different than the parable of the talents. You see, the parable of the talents is a story that Jesus told privately. He told it privately only to his disciples. This story he's telling and he's telling it for everyone. The master here has ten stewards, and not three, and each steward gets the exact same

amount; they get a mina. Now, a mina is a fraction of the talent that was given in the other story. It's worth about 1/60th of a talent. It's equal to about three months' wages. And the master in this story is also very different than the master in the parable of the talents. There he's just a wealthy man who invests his wealth and then he leaves. Well here in the parable of the mina, we have a very different picture of the master. It says in verse 12: *He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.'* But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us. 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."

You see, the master in the story is a nobleman leaving to be appointed king, but his subjects hate him. In fact, they send a delegation after him to protest his authority or lack of it. And now that may make no sense to us but it made perfect sense to Jesus' original hearers, and this is why. There was a man named Archelaus who was a appointed king over that area. He was Herod's son and he was an absolute disaster as a king. He was absolutely and completely incompetent. He did exactly what Jesus was speaking

about, he went to Rome to receive his kingship and the Jews had done exactly what Jesus was describing as well; they sent a delegation to Rome claiming this Archelaus was completely incompetent. But they were ignored. And so Archelaus became king, and he was so awful that he wound up getting deposed. And in his place there was a series of lieutenant governors, they were all installed, each one worse than the last one. In fact, at this moment, they're on their fifth replacement and his palace was very near where Jesus was walking when he started this story. Now the Jews hated this fifth replacement as much as they hated Archelaus. He was a cowardly man known for doing what was ever -- whatever was expedient, and he went by the name Pontius Pilate. So Jesus' reference in the story was spot on to the circumstance that they were in, with one large exception. You see, Jerusalem had two kings and not just one that they were rejecting. Archelaus was the earthly king, Jesus of Nazareth was the real king, and we note that the story ends on a very sober note. The king 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."* This is a swift and severe judgment. And though the people did not know it, this is what was looming for Israel. Again, you have to remember where Jesus is as he's telling the story. Verse 11 says: *As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem.* Well, when Jesus actually got to

Jerusalem, do you remember what took place? I mean he rode in on a colt of a donkey, there's great joy, there's celebration, there's welcome, the people are laying down palm branches. The whole city is worshipping his coming. And in the midst of this, do you remember what Jesus did? Luke 19:41 says: *And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

Jesus wept, and he wept because he knew there was a swift, certain and terrifying judgment coming for all who would refuse this king's authority. The king will one day say 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."* Now, you got to know, this is not a Jesus that we like to think about. But this is the theme that Jesus repeats over and over. Romans 11:22 says this, it says: *Note then the kindness and the severity of God: Severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be*

cut off.

Now we look at these stories that Jesus is telling them, we see bad stewards, they're terminated in the parable of the shrewd steward, they are thrust into outer darkness in the parable of the faithful steward, and in this story, they are summarily executed. Now those judgments just don't register with us because stewardship is really something that most in the evangelical culture just wink at. You know, the relationship that Jesus is emphasizing is that he is Lord, he is king, he is master, and we are his servants who will give an account. You know, that doesn't fit well in a culture that sees the body of Christ, his church as a group of consumers looking for and feeling entitled to the best benefits that God can provide. That's perfectly backwards. You know, many churches have adopted this "consumer" attitude that says the customer is always right. Amen. But church members are not customers. They are servants. They are stewards. And each of us is charged with the task of faithfully managing the resources the master has entrusted us with for the sake of the kingdom. And we ignore that at our peril but, you know, ignore it we often do.

You see, bad stewards face terrible judgments, not for being bad stewards but because their bad stewardship has exposed their true citizenship. To put it succinctly: Actions speak much louder than

words; and bad stewards, inaction is what identifies him as a false believer. You see, in all three of these accounts: The parable of the talents, the parable of the wise steward and the parable of the ten minas, the master doesn't say, "Tell me what you've done." He says, "Show me what you've done." "Give me an accounting." You know, it was Martin Luther who is said to have said, "We are saved by faith alone by a faith that is never alone." It is always expressed in deeds. James 2:17 says: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* You know, if there are no works in my life, it is proof that there was no faith there to begin with. I said this many times, works are to faith what breath is to life. You know, breathing is proof that you're alive but breathing doesn't make you alive. As awful as this sounds, I could get a corpse and hook it up to a heart-lung machine and I could make a corpse breathe and it's not going to be alive. So breath doesn't produce life; it simply is a sign that life is there. Works are the same way. Works do not produce saving faith. And dead faith can produce all kinds of works. Just ask the Pharisees. They did all kinds of dead deeds. But genuine, real, God-given new creature life in the Spirit faith will always enthusiastically produce works, and those are the works that prove their spiritual life. Now, if you can't find any works to document your faith, don't discount the works like many evangelicals do. Instead, discount your faith. Ask yourself if you're not kidding yourself.

You know, for the last half century, the evangelical church has often unwittingly helped us kid ourselves by selling us a faith that cost next to nothing. "Just say some words, and show up occasionally, give us some money, and you're good to go. Don't worry, be happy." That's a recipe for disaster. You know, as a shepherd here, I am responsible for what you think faith requires. I would much rather you be upset with me in concern that you might not be in the faith than blindly unconcerned that faith -- considering that faith costs you nothing. The steward who buried his talent or hid his mina in a cloth learned too little, too late that ignorance was not bliss. In fact, he learned that it was deadly.

Our story this morning adds some more details to this portrait we're painting of what a steward is. And again, to get the whole story, we need to look at the context. Once again, the parable opens up with this statement, it says: *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.* Now consider the mindset of Jesus' hearers. For three years now, Jesus and his disciples have traveled around living like vagabonds, and his followers probably thought all of this is about to change. Now we're going to get what is ours.

Jesus is now peaking in popularity. Verse 11 says: *They supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.* They were terribly mistaken. I mean, Jesus knew and we now know that the king was indeed going away for thousands of years. It's been over 2,000 years since the king was rejected and Jesus is still in the distant country, but he gave them one instruction. He said, *"Engage in business until I come."* You know, within days of that command, the people saw their king just like he said he would be, rejected, hated, executed. Jesus said privately told the disciples exactly what was going to happen. In Matthew 20:17, it says this, it says: *As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."* See, the disciples got special and specific instruction. Jesus' followers, they were only told that the king's subjects hated him and that they sent a delegation saying: We don't want this man as king. Again verse 15 says however, it says: *"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."* Now we all know the king has not yet returned. But we are those servants. You know, the vast

majority of us, we don't get five or two or even one of those talents, but every one of us gets a mina, and every one of us is going to have to give an account when the master returns.

So what are the actions that all good stewards demonstrate with the mina we have been given? Well, they are discipline, diligence, and determination. Let's look at how these define how a true steward acts. The first one is discipline. You know, in 21st century North America, the most obvious expression of discipline in a steward is how he handles his money, because that's what a mina actually is, it really means money. It's the one thing that God owns and temporarily places in the hands of his stewards. You know, it's the master who hands out the minas, and we promptly forget that he's the one who owns them. We just manage them temporarily. What we also forget is that how we manage those resources whose value is only temporary determines how we are going to manage our real resources eternally.

This is what Randy Alcorn says in *The Treasure Principle*. He says this: *"When Jesus warns us not to store up treasures on earth, it's not just because wealth might be lost: It's because wealth will always be lost. Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it and we die. No exceptions. Imagine you are alive at the end of the Civil War. You are living in the South, but you are a*

Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war is over. While in the South, you've accumulated lots of Confederate currency. Now, suppose you know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and the end is imminent. What will you do with your Confederate money? If you're smart, there's only one answer, you should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for US currency -- the only money that will have value once the war is over. There's nothing wrong with Confederate money, as long as you understand its limits. Realizing its value is temporary should radically affect your investment strategy. To accumulate vast earthly treasures that you can't possibly hold onto for long is equivalent to stockpiling Confederate money even though you know it's about to become worthless. According to Jesus, storing up earthly treasures is simply wrong. It is just plain stupid."

So storing up treasures on earth really is nothing more than stupid. But you know, storing up treasures in heaven, well, that requires discipline. And the first discipline is really just buying into a steward's mentality. You know that is the more I see God as owner and myself as manager, the more I can see money as a tool that God intends it to be.

This raises a very big question about where we are in the United States and where the church is. The question is this: What if the

church in the wealthiest country in the history of mankind was given its wealth primarily to steward? What if our task in the United States was to distribute this immense wealth to all of the other churches in the world, and what if instead of distributing it, we just decided to keep it. Again, let me give you Randy Alcorn. He says: *"Suppose you had something important you want to get to someone who needs it. You wrap it up and you hand it over to the Fed Ex guy. What would you think if instead of delivering the package, he took it home, opened it, kept it for himself? You'd say: "This guy doesn't get it. The packages don't belong to him. He's just the middleman. His job is to get them from me, to the person I want him to hand them off to. Just because God puts his money in our hands doesn't mean he intends for it to stay there."*

Listen to what Paul told the Corinthian church which was very prosperous about the church in Jerusalem which was desperate. In 2 Corinthians 8:14, he said this, he said: *Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."* I had the privilege of seeing that firsthand when I went to visit our sister church in India. You know, our plenty and your generosity as a church brought us to their

poverty. They were extraordinarily poor in material wealth but incredibly rich in spiritual discipline. You know, just think about this, they thought nothing as a community of gathering for an entire night -- I don't mean just for an evening -- through the night, 1:00 o'clock, 2:00 o'clock, 3:00 o'clock, 4:00 o'clock, 5:00 o'clock in the morning to pray for us. That's amazing. So we exchanged our plenty which really is our money for their plenty which is the discipline of prayer, and there was an equality there. You see, that's the way churches really are supposed to operate. And if you notice, Paul really, he had no trouble at all addressing the issue of money. You know, here in the United States, we don't touch that with a ten-foot pole. And when you think about it, money is one of the most strange and difficult areas there is to even talk about.

Again, I want to share with you Randy Alcorn's thoughts on this because I think they are spot on. This is what he says. He says: *"It is increasingly common for Christians to ask one another the tough questions: 'How is your marriage?' 'Have you been spending time in the word?' 'How are you doing in terms of sexual purity?' 'Have you been sharing your faith?' But how often do we ask: 'How much are you giving to the Lord?' or 'Have you been robbing God?' or 'Are you wing the battle against materialism?' When it comes to giving, churches operate under a 'don't ask, don't tell'*

policy. We lack communication, accountability and even modeling, it's as if we have an unspoken agreement: 'I won't talk about it if you won't, so we can go right on living as we are.' Think about it. How does a young christian in the church learn to give? Where can he go to see what giving looks like in the life of a believer captivated by Christ? Why are we surprised when, seeing no other example, he takes his cues from the materialistic society? We are to 'consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.' Should we then be asking how we can spur one another on toward giving?"

See, the fact is, a steward gives money not as an end but as a means to an end, and the end is the kingdom. And to that end, we should not just consider giving but radical giving. Not just 10 percent, but 20 percent to 90 percent of my income, should God prosper me. Now as Alcorn puts it: *"God prospers me not to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving!"* And that requires discipline. We have to realize that the discipline of giving also, it never escapes God's gaze, no matter how big or small. We have the widow's two pennies, we have the five loaves and the two fishes, we even have a cup of cold water. All of those gifts are written down by an "auditor" who sees and knows everything. And one day we will all stand before that auditor and see every single detail of our stewardship on display, and

discipline today can make that a joy rather than a terror.

Now, the second way a steward acts is with diligence. And diligence can be summed up in one simple cliché. Diligence is *"keeping my eyes on the prize."* And that is no simple task. You know, by age 20, the average person has seen over one million commercials. That's one million different prizes all competing for my time, my attention, and of course, my money. Diligence keeps me focused on who and what the real prize is. And again, so how do I stay diligent? Well, the solution is right here. The solution is all around you. It is the local body of Christ. Here is where the prize is affirmed and reaffirmed, in the pulpit, in prayer and hopefully in the pew. This is what Hebrews 10:24 is speaking about, it says: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

God says we are to encourage each other. To encourage actually means to supply or resupply courage. The church is supposed to be the community that orients and reorients us toward the kingdom of God when the world, the flesh, and the devil are doing everything they can to thrust us towards earth. 1 Peter 5:8 says: *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a*

roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. And you know how he does that? The very first thing that he will do is to try to peel you away from the body of Christ. You all know this, corporate worship is a habit, and it's a habit that you have to work on. And if you're in that habit, you're going to find that the very first time that you decide to skip church, it's going to feel very, very awkward, it's going to feel weird, things are going to seem a little bit off, but you're also going to find this, a second time it's going to be a little bit easier; the next time is going to be easier still. And there's a reason for this. You see, the enemy's second step is to isolate you. He's got the world chanting his mantra 24/7, and through his church, God's kingdom speaks back. And keeping you from being exposed to that is his stated goal. And his third step is the one that he works on 24/7, is to get you to redefine what the prize is. You know, the church shouts "it's Christ and his kingdom." The enemy says, no, no, no, no, it's money, it's sex, it's power, it's influence, it's stuff. You name it. Diligence keeps its eyes fixed on the prize. Now, can you be a diligent steward on your own? You know, can you stay focused diligently on the return of your master without being involved in a local church? Well, some folks do. Most folks can't. So the question is why would you risk it?

And again, this leads me to my third point of how a steward acts.

Number one, he is disciplined. He sees money as a means to an end and the end of course is the kingdom. Number two, he is diligent. He finds the way to keep his eyes on the prize. And finally, a steward who acts is a steward who is determined. This is a tough one. You see, many a Christian has tasted church and found incompetence, indifference, insincerity and far, far worse. And many a church has tempted many a steward to just bury his mina and forget it. I suspect the master will not be moved. "The church is lame." That sounds a lot like the excuses the stewards gave. You know, "The church is lame, so I kept your mina in a cloth. Here is what is yours." The faithful steward works for God through the local church. His connection to church is not based on the benefits he or she wants but on the gifts that he or she can bring. He or she are determined to do God's will God's way and that way is through the local church. According to Ephesians 4, every child of God has been given a gift to *"equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."* That gift is your mina. And your master is coming.

Now, the first steward, he came to the king and he said, *"Sir, your mina has earned ten more."* That's a thousand percent return. You know, the total amount may be smaller, it may be insignificant with regard to the big picture, but that matters not a bit to God. The king says, *"Well done, good servant! Because you have been*

faithful in very little, you shall have authority over ten cities." People say, "What does that mean?" I think it means just what it says. Disciplined, diligent, and determined stewardship carries with it huge, huge eternal rewards. You know, the ten mina steward is going to govern ten cities; the five mina steward will govern five. Now I think those are real cities in a real kingdom and I believe that reward is going to be eternal and beyond our wildest imaginations. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says: *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him."* And to suggest otherwise is to suggest that Jesus is just playing word games with his final teachings. Remember, Jesus taught this parable of the minas to the masses. He was teaching it to all of us. Remember, he taught the parable of the talents privately to his disciples. This kind of makes sense. You see, God chose the disciples to receive a fortune to start with. A talent was a fortune. A mina was a small fraction of that. Jesus says in Luke 12:48: *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.* You know, the disciples, they received much. They were hand chosen by the master himself. They ate and they slept and they ministered with God himself. And with the exception of John, God demanded every one of their lives, literally.

The minas, well the minas is the gift that God gives to the masses. It's the gift that God gives to you and to me. Actually that's not entirely accurate. It's not really a gift because gifts have no strings attached. If this was a gift, then burying it in the field or a cloth will be no big deal. But it wasn't a gift. It was an investment. See, the master made that clear when he said, "*Engage in business until I come.*" Well, then somebody could say, "Well, then, isn't the gospel just a matter of works? I mean, the king invests, the servants work, those who produce, well, they got rewarded." Well, that's not how this works. You see, the master invests abundantly. He's like a farmer cultivating a whole field and that field has wheat and it also has tares in it. No one knows who the true stewards are but the master. You know, if you look around you right now, the chances are that some of us or most of us here are true stewards. The terrible truth is, chances are, that some of us or not. And those that are given hearts for the king, they treasure the kingdom because the king declares in Matthew 6: "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Stewards who bury their talent or their minas did so for one reason and one reason only; they did it because their heart wasn't in it. In both cases, the master states basically how easy it would have been for them to make a profit. You know, he said, "If you just took this to the bankers, I would have made a

return." Well, they didn't invest because they didn't want the master to gain a thing. The question we ask is why. And the answer is really simple. It's stated very clearly in scripture. It's what lies in the heart of every single person who is outside the kingdom of God. Verse 14 says it: *"But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'"*

See, bad stewards just don't have it in them to be good stewards, not because they're lazy or shiftless but because they hate the king. *"Lord, here is your mina which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; 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."* See, it just takes the right circumstance to work that hatred out. The steward was stripped of his mina not because he didn't perform well. He was stripped of his mina because he was not part of the kingdom. His performance meant nothing to him because his heart and his treasure was elsewhere. He just didn't have a steward's heart within him.

Let me give you an analogy from God's creatures. I've done this before, but, you know, every year white tail deer, they lose their antlers and they begin the process of growing new ones. And as it gets these new antlers, it rubs his antlers against trees and

rocks, and other hard objects in order to work out the antlers that God has already worked in. Now, let's say a bear observes these deer doing this and gets the bright idea that it would like to get some antlers as well. You don't mind absurd analogies, do you? This is a fairly absurd one. Okay. So the bear observes the deer and he does every single thing that the deer does. He rubs his head against the ground, against the rocks, and against the trees, and by golly, he never grows a set of antlers. He never will grow a set of antlers because the bear cannot work out what God has not worked in. That's why Philippians 2:12 says: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* You see, the good steward is working out what God has already worked in. He couldn't contain his delight in showing the master what he had done with the gifts God had given him. Verse 16: *"Lord, your mina has earned ten minas more."* You see, his heart delights to serve the master.

So the key question that we have to ask ourself when it comes to our stewardship is not one of performance, it's one of the heart. And the question is: Do I have a heart for the kingdom? Is that where my treasure lies? You see, a disciplined, diligent, and determined steward is not working his way into heaven. He is working out the love that God has already worked into his heart. If you are one of his, your heart is going to alternately nag,

encourage, whisper, and shout that you are here to bring honor and glory to Him, and you will find that stewardship is your greatest delight. If you are not one of his, it will all seem like tedious slave labor demanded by an authority you hate whose reign you resent. Now the question you have to ask is: Does that describe me? And does it bother me? Well, if it does, just admit it. Ask God for a heart for his kingdom now while there is still time. The master, you see, is still off in a distant country where he has been appointed king and he is coming back, and today is one day sooner. And when he does come back, he's going to detail every moment, every nickel, every cup of cold water you ever gave to his kingdom. And there is no auditor on earth who will know like he knows. He will judge us not by what we say but by what we have done. He will give each of us a detailed audit not of our pocketbooks or activities but of our hearts as measured by our pocketbooks and activities as well, and then where our treasure was will show where our hearts really were. My prayer for each of us sitting here is that we will all have steward's hearts that delight in these glorious words: *"Well done, my good servant."* Let's pray.

Father God, I just -- I thank you for your word, I thank you for the warning that is there in your word especially in the warnings that are there in all of these parables about stewardship. Oh,

Lord, how easy it is for us in the evangelical church to just wink at stewardship, to understand it as something that's optional, something that we just might take on if we have the time, if we have the interest or the inclination. Lord, show us what the heart of a true believer is, show us that the heart of a true believer is the heart of a steward, and lacking that desire to be a steward would cause us to question am I really part of this kingdom. I pray if that is the case, Lord, that you would convict those who are outside the kingdom to understand to ask for new hearts, hearts that long to serve, hearts that long to steward. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.