

# “WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!”

Matthew 25:1-46

Key Verse: 25:21

**“His master replied, ‘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!’”**

In chapter 24, Jesus foretold the signs of the end of the age and his coming again in glory. Though many dreadful and painful things happen, God works steadily through his servants to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony to all nations. Then Jesus will come with power and great glory as the culmination of human history. Surely, he will come again! This is our hope. But we don’t know when. These days we see more and more signs that Jesus will come soon. What should we do? Some people panic. Others feel overwhelmed. Still others want to do something great. In this passage, through two parables and a portrait of final judgment, we can learn how to live until Jesus comes again. Most important is our personal faith in Jesus. As a fruit of this faith, we serve him as good stewards, and practice compassion toward the needy. Let’s learn how to prepare for Jesus’ coming.

**First, “keep watch” (1-13).** Jesus said, “**At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom**” (1). This parable is told against the background of marriage in Jesus’ day. The ten virgins are equivalent to modern bridesmaids. They were specially chosen by the bride to help prepare for the wedding. Usually wedding guests gathered at the bride’s home throughout the day. The exact time of the bridegroom’s coming was not known. Suddenly he would be announced by messengers and appear. He would claim his bride and take her to his father’s house for the wedding. The virgins’ task was to welcome the bridegroom and accompany the bride to his house—lighting the way.

Among the ten virgins, five were foolish and five were wise (2). In what sense were they wise or foolish? Was it based on SAT scores or which university they attended? No! It was based on how they prepared to do their task (3-4). The wise ones devoted themselves to the preparation as a priority. They considered the meaning of the wedding, the special memories they would share with the bride, the privilege of meeting the bridegroom with her and participating in the banquet. They brought oil along with their lamps in

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case the bridegroom’s coming was delayed. They were fully prepared. On the other hand, the foolish virgins did not think about their task so seriously. They daydreamed about the ceremony but did nothing to prepare. When they saw the wise ones preparing extra oil, they thought it was a waste and burdensome. This was a serious mistake. Spiritually speaking, the oil may refer to the Spirit of Christ. Romans 8:9b says, **“If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”**

Here we learn that the criteria of being wise or foolish is preparing to meet Jesus. To do this, it is most important to have personal faith in Jesus and to grow in our relationship with him. Faith comes through hearing the word of God and prayerfully enduring the hardships of life. Faith in Jesus creates a dynamic relationship with him which produces in us godly character, a Biblical value system, and living hope in the kingdom of God. Investing to grow in faith in Jesus is the wisest thing we can do. One who engages in deep Bible study and prayer during high school or college days is really a wise person. High school seniors who are preparing gospel messages now are truly wise people. To the foolish, it seems that this is a waste of time. They live according to the flesh, and ridicule those who live by the Spirit. Someday, knowing Christ personally will be all that really matters.

Verse 5a says, **“The bridegroom was a long time in coming.”** If he had come quickly, all the virgins would have been ready. But he did not. We may guess that he was haggling with the father over the dowry; she was such a beautiful and wonderful bride, it took a long time. Since his coming was delayed, the virgins all became drowsy (5b). Their eyelids became heavy and they all fell into a deep sleep. Soon it was midnight. In those times, people had no electric light. It was a time of deep and quiet darkness. But suddenly, the cry rang out: **“Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!”** (6) The bridegroom is Jesus. Jesus will come suddenly and unexpectedly. No one knows the day or hour. He can come tonight or tomorrow, in ten years or a hundred years. One thing is very clear: he will surely come. When he comes, those who have the Spirit of Christ will be ready to meet him. To them, it will be a joyful and victorious moment. But to those who live only by the flesh, it will be a dreadful moment.

Upon hearing the midnight cry, all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps (7). Here “trimmed” means to cut and shape the lamp’s wick so

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that the flame would burn brightly and efficiently. The wise ones quickly did so and filled their lamps with the extra oil; they shone brightly. The wise were ready to meet the bridegroom! However, the foolish suddenly realized that their fuel was running out. They never expected this to happen, and they began to panic. In desperation, they pleaded with the wise, **“Give us some of your oil”** (8). The wise virgins said, **“No, there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves”** (9). This indicates that there is something we cannot borrow in preparing to meet Jesus; it is personal faith. While the foolish were on their way to buy oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready joyfully welcomed him. Then the door was shut (10). This has deep meaning. While the door of salvation is open, as it is now, anyone can enter by faith. But the door will close, and then no one can go in. The foolish virgins, running as fast as they could, with oil in hand, approached the wedding banquet. Finding the door shut, they were terrified and said, **“Lord, Lord, open the door for us!”** (11) Even though they called him “Lord,” he said, **“Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”** It is not enough to say, “I know Jesus.” We must be known by Jesus. It is a reciprocal relationship, like that of a vine and branch, in which we listen to him, respond to him, and grow to be like him. For this we need to walk by the Spirit every day (Gal 5:16). Recently, Vice President Mike Pence was criticized for claiming that he hears Jesus’ voice, which influences his daily life and service to our country. His critic said he must be crazy. However, in terms of having personal faith in Christ, Vice President Pence is right. Having a relationship with Jesus is two-way. Jesus speaks to us through his word and Spirit, and we also speak to him. Those who have a robust relationship with Jesus will be ready when he comes. They long for Jesus’ return every day. This is what it means to “keep watch” (13).

**Second, put his money to work (14-30).** In addition to keeping watch, we must also live as good and faithful stewards of God-given talents. Jesus illustrated this truth through a parable. Before going on a journey, a very rich man called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags and to another one bag, each according to his ability (15). Other translations refer to the bags of gold as “talents.” One talent was worth \$600,000. Each one had enough money to start a business. The obvious implication was that they should put his money to work until he returned. In the same way, God has entrusted to each person the gift of life and at least one talent. Some people think that they have no talent. But this is

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not true. When we seriously and prayerfully consider this, everyone has talents. College students may have at least five talents. Talents are given, not for people to boast about, but to be used to make a profit for God. We should not compare our God-given talents with others. If we do, we become groundlessly proud, or envious and miserable. Rather, we should be thankful to God and use our talents for his glory.

The man with five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more (16). The one with two bags of gold gained two more (17). But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money (18). After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them (19). Here the words “a long time” indicate that there would be some time to work before Jesus returned. The words “settled accounts” foresees that each person will give an account of how they have used their talents. This will not be a group accounting, but of each individual, one by one. The criteria are not what one has, but what one has done. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”**

The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. With joy he said confidently, **“Master, you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.”** The master was pleased and commended, **“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!”** (21) Then the man who had received the two bags of gold brought the other two. He gave a similar report to the first servant and the master responded in the same way. The master did not compare the servants with each other but commended each one based on faithfulness to his trust. In American education, there are two main methods of evaluation: the bell curve, and an absolute standard. God uses his absolute standard, not a bell curve. Both servants made a 100% profit, based on what they were given. Both received an A+. Their reward was the same.

What was their reward? First, they were recognized as good and faithful servants. This was a commendation of their character. In fact, they reflected God's own character. Their motive was pure. They did not cheat or

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lie, nor were they malicious or sneaky. They were honest, kind, loving and creative. They were devoted to God fully and served him wholeheartedly. They did not give up when things were hard but persevered to the end. To be commended by God for one's good and faithful stewardship is indeed great. Many people crave recognition from others. It may feel good for a short time, but it is imperfect and temporary. On the other hand, to be commended by the Creator God gives perfect and everlasting satisfaction. The second reward is to be given greater responsibility, privilege and authority. God's reward is not like retirement to a rest home; it challenges us to grow. The third one is to share the master's happiness. The word "happiness" in Greek is "*chara*" which means "joy." Nothing can compare with God's joy. To experience God's joy is so amazing and wonderful that we cannot describe it with words; it is inexpressible (1Pe 1:8).

How could the two servants earn such a wonderful commendation? Their secret lies in how they viewed the master's trust. When the master entrusted his wealth to them, they realized that it was a very precious privilege and blessing to them. They knew that the master loved and respected them. In response, they loved their master and gave their hearts to be good stewards of his trust. They wanted to please their master by making a profit. This was the wellspring of diligence, hard work, creativity, wisdom and persistence. This is what enabled them to be faithful with a few things and earn their master's commendation. God is pleased by faithfulness. God wants us to be faithful with whatever he has given us, no matter how small it may seem. Some people assume they will be faithful if they are given a big trust, but they ignore a small trust. Jesus teaches us that whoever can be trusted with something small can also be trusted with something big (Lk 16:10a). Faithfulness does not depend on the size of the trust. The motive for being faithful to God is love. When we love God, we want to please him and be faithful. In fact, we love him because he first loved us and gave us his one and only Son Jesus. He forgave all our sins and entrusted us with the most precious task of proclaiming the gospel to the people of all nations. Last Friday, the funeral ceremony for Reverend Billy Graham was held. His ministry spanned eight decades and he proclaimed the gospel directly to more people than anyone in history. Among the many things said about him was that he was faithful as a servant of God's word. He did not proclaim his own ideas and opinions, but the word of God as it is written in the Bible. He often said, "The Bible says...." So many people heard the gospel through him and

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were saved. May God help all of us to be faithful in proclaiming the gospel, as he was.

The man who had received one bag of gold came and said, **“Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you”** (24-25). He viewed his master as cruel and greedy. He felt burdened by his master’s trust. He did not love his master; he was afraid of him and was not faithful. In fact, fear had paralyzed his mind and made him useless. In the same way, some people who have received a talent from God are too afraid to do anything with it. So they just hide it away. They do nothing for the Lord and spend all their time on their own affairs. The master said to him, **“You wicked, lazy servant!”** (26-27) His bag of gold was taken and given to the one who had ten (28-29). Then he was thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (30). Charles Templeton was once an evangelist, working alongside Billy Graham. Through a tragic event, he allowed his view of God to become dark and negative. Eventually he fell into apostasy and wasted his talents. I hope that none of us may be like this.

**Third, serve needy people with the mind of Jesus (31-46).** In this section, Jesus described the final judgment at his glorious throne. When Jesus came the first time, he became our Savior, Friend, Servant and Good Shepherd. He served all kinds of sinners with love and compassion. But when he comes again, he will come in his glory and power with all his heavenly angels and sit on a glorious throne as the King and Judge of all peoples of all nations. He will divide people into two groups, putting those like sheep on his right and those like goats on his left. At that time, no one can deceive Jesus. Then King Jesus will say to those on his right, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”** (34). He explains why. It was because they took care of needy people with love and compassion (35-36). The righteous do not realize that they did these things for him (37-39). It was their expression of faith in Jesus which produced genuine love for the needy around them (Gal 5:6). In serving his needy brothers and sisters, they were serving him (40).

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Then King Jesus says to those on his left, **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”** (41). Why? Because they ignored needy people. Jesus often approaches us through the least one. It is easy to ignore such people. But doing so reveals that we do not have the mindset of Jesus: humbleness, love and compassion. Jesus said, **“Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”** Jesus concluded, **“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”** (46). There are only two possible destinations for each person: eternal punishment or eternal life. This final judgment is everlasting and irreversible. What is your destiny?

In today’s passage, we find several sharp contrasts: wise versus foolish, good and faithful versus wicked and lazy, sheep versus goats, blessed versus cursed. This contrast is not based on nationality, race, wealth or social and educational background. It is based on faith in Jesus. This was shocking to Jewish people of the time, who claimed God’s kingdom based on the Abrahamic covenant. Jesus wanted them to know that they need personal faith in him. The same is true for us. We will not automatically enter Jesus’ kingdom because we go to church, were born in a Christian family, or do many activities in the name of God. We need to have personal faith in Jesus. As the fruit of this faith, we should be good and faithful stewards, and serve needy people with Christ’s mindset. These are the ones who inherit Jesus’ kingdom when he comes again.