**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!’”**

 Matthew 24 ended with a parable meant to emphasize the idea of readiness for the coming of Jesus. In this chapter, we are going to learn two more parables which have the same principle in regards to the readiness for Jesus’ return. Let us learn the wisdom to prepare for the second coming of Jesus.

1. **Oil and lamp (1-13)**

Jesus introduces the Jewish wedding tradition as a metaphor of his coming. There were three stages to a Jewish wedding in those days. The first was Kidusshin(Pre-arrangement)– a formal agreement made by the fathers. The second was Erusin(*betrothal* )– the ceremony where mutual promises are made. The third was Nissuin (*marriage)* – approximately one year after the betrothal, the bridegroom returns to bring his bride to his home to be united. The bridegroom came at an unexpected time to bring his bride to his home. Until that time comes, the bride must keep herself pure. In this parable, the first two stages have already taken place. The wedding feast was about to begin when the bridegroom appeared to bring his bride. Here the ten virgins were bride-maids who were attending the bride. They went forth to meet the bridegroom with lamps on to conduct him and his companions into the house.

Look at verse 5 **“The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.”** All ten of the virgins slept, because the bridegroom was delayed. There were two groups of virgins. The first group of five were foolish because they didn’t take any extra oil with them. The second group of five were wise for they took the oil along with lamps. When the bridegroom arrived, there was a cry out **“Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!**

Upon hearing the midnight cry, all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps (7). 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 other five virgins 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). 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 is the parable that shows what to prepare ourselves for the second coming of Jesus. Bridegroom refers to Jesus and the ten virgins are the believers who wait for Jesus’ return. In the parable, five virgins were regarded as the foolish and the other five virgins were the wise. Simply because, the first five didn’t prepare the extra oil to wait for the bridegroom. The consequence of lacking oil made a big difference between the two parties. The wise virgins met the groom with joy and they joined in the wedding banquet. However, the foolish virgins couldn’t meet up the bridegroom because the door was closed and the groom rejected them saying **“I don’t know you”**

The point of Jesus’ teaching in this passage is simple. We must fill up the oil to burn up the lamp continuously and the oil must be stored enough to wait for the second coming of Jesus. They are the wise virgins who will meet up when Jesus returns and they will join in the wedding supper which is prepared for the Lamb in the Kingdom of heaven.

It is crucial to know what oil and lamp is so that we are able to prepare ourselves to meet Jesus when he comes again. In the parable, ten virgins carried the lamps to see the bridegroom clearly so that they could conduct him to the bride's home. Matthew 5:14-15 read **“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”**

Here, Jesus identifies us as the light of the world. When Jesus and his words dwell in us, the lamp of God shines so brightly so that people in the darkness would see Jesus and will give glory to him. The source of the lamp is oil. The oil burns up the lamp so that the lamp always shines. The emblem of oil in the Bible is the Holy Spirit as Zechariah saw the vision of “The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees”. Without oil the wedding party was not ready for the bridegroom. Without the Holy Spirit, no one is ready for the return of Jesus. Therefore, preparing the extra oil to burn the lamp continuously means to be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit. It requires lifelong struggle because there are conflicts in us in between the desires of the flesh and that of the Spirit. In order to burn the lamp in this dark world, we must store the fuel of the Holy Spirit enough to go on our life journey until Jesus comes again.

During the military service, M. Peter, a transportation officer, was in charge of traveling from city to city to carry out some military tasks. His truck driver prepared an exact amount of gas for the trip, a total of 40 liters of gas. M. Peter was unhappy with him because the driver didn’t include the unexpected situation of delay. M. Peter gave him an order to prepare 80 liters of gas in case of an emergency situation. As he had expected, his truck was caught in traffic that they spent hours and hours on the road but the extra gas was more than enough to fulfill the mission. As a result, M. Peter was proved as a wise military officer.

We received a holy mission to carry the light of the world to shine the dark world. There are many things to do but we should never ignore preparing the extra oil to keep burning the lamp that we carry. Especially, during our lifelong journey to wait for the second coming of Jesus, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit to walk with him, to keep ourselves pure and to feed others with the words of life. At times, we may become drowsy and fall asleep. However, Jesus knows our weaknesses and he knows how we have been struggling to live by the Spirit. Jesus sees our life with a holistic view. This is very important. When the bridegroom finally arrived, the ten virgins had all fallen asleep but that was not the criteria for them to enter the banquet or not. The five wise virgins prepared the extra oil prior to their journey to meet up with the bridegroom. The five foolish virgins didn’t prepare for it and they asked to borrow some oil from the wise. But the oil could not be shared at that moment which means that the life of being filled with the holy spirit must be individual and lifelong effort. Daily prayer, repentance, meditation on the words of God, serving others and heartfelt worship are the acts of storing the extra oil in our hearts and God sees all these strugglings. In doing so, we never lack our oil to burn up the lamp and we will see Jesus clearly on the last day. Consequently, we will be known by our bridegroom, Jesus, when he comes again.

On the other hand, the five foolish virgins asked the bridegroom to open the door for them. What was his answer? **“Truly I tell you. I don’t know you!”** What a dreadful day it would be for those who hear this answer back from Jesus. They knew the bridegroom was returning but they were not filling up the extra oil.

Is your lamp on? Do you have enough oil to burn the lamp for the long journey? You will have the “fuel alarm red light”when the gas is running out while driving. God gives us alarm through events and people around us when our oil of the Holy Spirit is not enough. If we keep ignoring this alarm, we will be in big trouble one day.

Let us be filled with the Holy Spirit from today on until Jesus comes again so that we are known to him and enter into the wedding banquet!

1. **Good and faithful servant (14-30)**

Jesus continues telling about another parable in regards to the preparation for his return. In this parable, there was a rich man who went out for the long journey. Before going on a journey, a master 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 16 years of labor. Each one had enough money to start a business. Talents are God-given gifts that everyone has received. 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. What does Jesus want to teach us in this parable?

 Firstly, we must be faithful to use our God-given talents to work for God. The first and the second servants received the bags of gold and went at once to put their money to work. Here, I read their heart's desire to please his master from those two servants. They went out to put the money to work at once. Here let’s take a look at the words **at once…** It must be difficult to start their business immediately with such a huge budget unless their business plan is ready. Two servants knew the master’s will even before his departure and they had set up all the business plans to initiate their businesses right away when the master’s order was given. In the end, both of them were successful in making double profits. One made the profit of five bags of gold and another made two bags of gold. The master’s comments were all the same in verses 21 and 23. **‘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!’** This teaches us an important lesson. The master didn’t mention how much profit they made in his comment. Rather he recognized their attitude of faithfulness over their tasks. As the master’s comments were exactly the same to the first and the second, we know that God will judge us not by the profit we made but by the attitude of doing his tasks. God does not compare his people according to their ability or accomplishment. Therefore, we shouldn’t compare our talents, abilities and achievements with others. What matters to God is our initiation to work with given talents and our faithfulness to continue what we are supposed to do. They are the people who are good and faithful and they will be rewarded by the Lord when he returns.

Secondly, this parable teaches us that we must know the master's will properly and we should do what our master wants us to do. 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). Unlike two servants, this servant had a wrong view of his master. If your boss or manager is very emotional and unreasonable, you will be uneasy to work under him. This servant thought that his master was a hard man, meaning harsh and unpredictable as he harvests where he has not sown. However, the master was very reasonable and generous. He provided them seed money to start a business and expected them to return the profit. He also didn’t mention anything about how much profit they made but the attitude of engaging in their works.

His wrong view and perception of his master made him fearful. He was afraid of losing the money and he hid them in the ground doing nothing for the master until the master returned. He gave back what belonged to the master. What was the master’s commnet? Look at verse 26 **‘You wicked, lazy servant!** Master was so upset and angry at him. He took his money and gave it to the servant who has 10 bags of gold saying “ **For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”** In some sense, the master's judge seemed to be too harsh because the servant didn’t lose the master's money at all. But the money was not what the master expected to receive back. The master wanted to see his servants working faithfully until he returned as their expression of loyalty, love and trust to their master. Unlike two servants, this man didn’t use the talents at all and he spent the entire life for his own purpose out of ignorance of the master’s will.

During the Bible study, our men missionaries had some time to share about the talents of a person next to us. M. Daniel told me that I have a sense of humor that can boost our meeting lively. I thought that I was a serious man in the church and in the home. M. Daniel found one gift of God for me and I will develop it and use this talent to be a peacemaker.

As we learned from the parable of the vineyard, God hires his servants for his vineyard to work. Some for planting, some for fertilizing and some for harvesting. In our church, some are good at teaching, serving music, co-working, organizing, encouraging and listening from others. We all have different gifts and ability to serve the church of God. Do not misunderstand God. Your talents must be used for the glory of God otherwise, you will lose what you have and will regret in the place of darkness like a worthless servant.

**Are your talents still hidden in the ground?** It is God’s will to open the talents box in you and put them to work. Our initiation and our faithfulness to work for God’s glory will be a great reward when Jesus comes again.

Jesus’ parables relating to his second coming have different contexts but they have common truth that Jesus wants us to know. Matthew 24:45 reads, **“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?** In the parable of ten virgins, the five wise virgins were faithful to prepare the extra oil to meet up the bridegroom. In this parable, we hear the master’s same comments to the first and the second servants in verse 21 **“‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things”**

Jesus’ parables have consistency to emphasize few spiritual lessons. No one knows the day and the hour of Jesus’ return. Therefore, all the believers must be faithful to live by the Spirit, to serve the LORD and to serve God’s people with God-given talents. The key word is faithfulness in keeping with a personal relationship with Jesus. When we do so, we will be known to Jesus and will be eligible to enter into the heavenly banquet when Jesus returns.