**WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT**

Sept. 23, 2012

Matthew 25:1‑46

Key Verses: 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!’”

Thank God for blessing Matthew’s Gospel study last one year. Today is the last lesson of Matthew’s study. It is fitting that we finish it with the glorious hope of the second coming of Jesus Christ. We will have communion after the message to celebrate it. Chapter 25 consists of three very beautiful parables: the ten virgins (1‑13), the talents (14‑30), and the sheep and the goats (31‑46). These parables teach us what we must do while we wait for Jesus’ second coming.

**First**, keep your lamp burning (1‑13). Look at verse 1. “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.” Today the bride is the center of attention at the wedding. Everyone waits for her arrival. Everyone stands when she enters the room. Everyone stares at her beautiful dress. The groom is just the guy sweating next to the preacher--the one lucky enough to have won the love of the beautiful bride. But in Jesus’ day, the bridegroom was the center of attention. Everyone waited for him. Part of the wedding celebration was a feast that followed the actual wedding ceremony. It was traditional for the bridesmaids to wait at a home together for the bridegroom to come and bring them to the wedding feast. Another part of the tradition was for the bridegroom to negotiate with the bride’s family about a gift to give them in return for their daughter. Often, the negotiations would be delayed by the bride’s parents as a way of communicating that they thought their daughter was worth much more than the groom had gestured by his initial gift. That would cause a delay in the wedding feast. In Jesus’ story, the bridesmaids are waiting through just such a delay. In such a delay, they were to be ready at any moment for him to arrive and escort them to the feast. Five of them, however, were not ready. They had time to get the extra oil they needed, but they did not feel the sense of urgency to do it right away. Their procrastination caused embarrassment when the groom came and they had to run to the store for more oil. The problem was that when they returned and sought entrance to the feast, they were considered no different than other uninvited people. The feast had begun and the doors were locked. It was too late. And Jesus says his return will be like that.

Here oil may refer to our personal relationship with Christ, including our faith and grace. There are things that we can borrow and things that we cannot borrow from others. We can borrow a car or a computer. But we cannot borrow our personal relationship with Christ. The main point of this parable is that we must make individual, personal and spiritual preparation in order to welcome Jesus when he comes again. We cannot shelter ourselves in the community of Christian fellowship or our family, thinking that we can borrow others’ faith and grace whenever we need them. We are responsible to establish and maintain a personal relationship with Christ through diligent Bible study, repentance, life of personal commitment and obedience to Christ. We must keep our lamp of faith burning personally in this dark world.

**Second**, put your money to work (14‑30). In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus talks about the personal and spiritual condition of his disciples as the bridesmaids of the wedding; whereas in the parable of the talents he refers to the personal work of his disciples as the stewards of his world salvation work. Look at verse 14,15. “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.” The master had personal knowledge of his servants’ ability. He entrusted the proper amount of talents to each of his servants and went on his journey. He no longer watched over his servants. He was absent from his estate. His servants were no longer supposed to wait for their master’s order. They were on their own. They must think, plan and act on their own.

Look at verse 16. “The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.” We don’t know exactly how this man who had received the five talents gained five more. Verse 16 says simply, “He put his money to work.” He no longer remained a passive servant. He acknowledged that he had been entrusted with his master’s talents. When he had this realization, God made him a man of mission, faithfulness and wisdom. He was thankful to the master who promoted him as a manager of his property. He knew that he did not deserve such honor. He decided not to disappoint his master’s expectation of him. He thought creatively and found inspiration. He overcame all kinds of obstacles and made things work out. He challenged the impossible things and made them possible. He gave his body, mind and heart to the task until he figured out how to put his money to work and made a 100% profit for his master. It was the same for the one who received the two talents.

What did the servant who had received one talent do? Look at verse 18. “But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.” He buried the talent he had received from his master and did nothing about it. A talent was the largest weight used by the Hebrews and was used to measure gold. In modern terms, a talent is worth one million dollars. Spiritually the talents are spiritual gifts and the mission God entrusted to us such as life, youth, college education, artistic and musical abilities, cooking skills, a joyful character, communication skills, Bible study materials, computer skills and so on. We must put these talents to work. We must use them for the glory of God and for building up the body of Christ. We must not bury them in the ground. We must not hide them. We must put them to work and give much profit to God.

Look at verses 19,20. “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’” Usually the servants do not want their master to come back because they are afraid of the time of settling accounts with the master. But this servant was happy that his master had finally come back. He wanted to share his joy that comes from success and achievement with his master. He was proud to present what he did with the five talents that he had received from his master and how he made a 100% profit. With great joy, he exclaimed, “Master, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more” (20).

What did the master say? Look at verse 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!’” The rewards to this servant from his master were his recognition as a good and faithful servant. To all mankind, the problem of recognition is not a small matter. Many young people want recognition. They want recognition as an intelligent person or a good athlete. But these kinds of recognition cannot satisfy our souls. When we are recognized by God as his good and faithful servants, we are indeed happy and feel glorious. When we are recognized by God as his good and faithful servants, we can recognize ourselves and our souls truly rejoice. Another reward is more responsibility and work. Verse 21b says, “You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.” God’s reward is not a vacation to the Bahamas. God exalts us with greater tasks and greater responsibilities. In other words, God makes us great.

Look at verse 22. “The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’” This man with the two talents had less ability than the man with the five talents. He could have become complacent, since he had less responsibility than the man with the five talents. He could have doubted his master’s love toward him and squandered the talents he had received out of his rebelliousness toward his master. But that was not the case. He humbly acknowledged that the two talents he had received were given to him according to his ability. He was thankful to his master that his master entrusted him with two talents. The master rewarded this servant in the same way he rewarded the servant with the five talents.

Let’s see what happened to the man who had received the one talent. Look at verses 24,25. “Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘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 talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’” He had a wrong view of the master and had his mind made up even before he received his talent. He looked at him as someone who was hard and harsh, instead of loving and gracious. What we think about God is the most important thing about us. If we view God as a tyrant, then we will filter everything through this lens. Some of you may be secretly angry with God because you think he did something, or didn’t do something that you think he should have. As a result, your view of him is skewed. Your preconceived notions prevent you from seeing him as a God of grace, and as a result you refuse to serve him with what he has given you. When we blame God, we end up burying our blessings.

A faulty view of God can also lead to excuses. In verse 25 this man declares that the reason he didn’t do anything with what he had been given was because he was afraid. His fear paralyzed him and so he decided to play it safe. He hid the money to make sure it wouldn’t be lost. And he accomplished exactly what he set out to achieve: nothing. Like the saying goes, “If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.” A wrong view of God always leads to fear: “So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground.” A right view of God always leads to faith. If you are struggling with fear today, the best antidote is to further your understanding of the character of God and ask him to grow your faith.

What did the master do with him? Look at verses 26-30. The master did not accept the servant’s excuses of not putting his money to work. He called him a wicked, lazy servant. He also called him worthless servant because he gave no profit to the master. Here we learn that giving profit to God is not an option but a divine mandate. We must put the talents God had given us to work and give much profit to God without any excuse.

**Third**, the sheep and the goats (31‑46). Look at verses 31,32. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” Who are the sheep? Sheep are those who put their money to work in order to serve others who are in great need. When they served those who were in need, they did not know that they were serving Jesus their King. But Jesus said in verse 40, “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” King Jesus will reward them with eternal life (46b).

Who are the goats? They are those who put their money to work only for themselves, not caring for others. When King Jesus told them that they did not do anything for him, they were surprised and protested to Jesus, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’” (44) Then he will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” (45) They are basically selfish people who have no idea to give something to others. They will go away to eternal punishment. (46a)

In this chapter we learn that while we are waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus, we must maintain personal love relationship with Jesus through deep Bible study, repentance, prayer and obedience to him. We also learn that we must work hard, putting the talents he had given to us to work for the glory of God and to serve needy people around the world.