

# Doing Your Job Well

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Today's scripture is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, verses 1 through 13. At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish, and five of them were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out, Here's the bridegroom, come out to meet him.

Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, Give us some of your oil. Our lamps are going out.

No, they replied. There may not be enough for both of us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut.

Later the others also came. Lord, Lord, they said, open the door for us. But he replied, Truly I tell you, I don't know you.

Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. As we come before you now, Lord, with our hearts open.

Lord, move in each of us and plant the seed you know we need. Let it grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

So, we're talking today about doing your job well. And I want you to think about the last time you were in a job interview. Now, I'm seeing some faces that don't look like they had a great time.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] But I want you to think about the last job interview you were in. How you had your questions prepared. You had your answers. You were ready to go. You had done your homework.

And you were trying to feel this out. But you also wanted to project the right image. You wanted folks to see how good you would be at this particular role. Now, let me tell you something else.

I know that there are others who have been on the other side of that desk, right? People who have done job interviews. Now, let me share with you a little secret. I had a 29-year secular career.

And I had an executive position during that time. And I cannot tell you how many job interviews I have done. Now, the reason why I bring that up, not only what it felt like to be on the one side of the desk, but the other side as well, is I want you to consider for one simple minute the fact that no one ever believes that they will be bad at a job.

Right? In all the job interviews I've ever done, I'm going to bet in all the interviews you've been a part of, no matter what side of the desk, no one goes into a job interview believing that they're going to be bad at this.

[ 3 : 49 ] Right? And that's kind of an important thing. Now, make sure you hear me right. I did not say that if you have a job, you may not love it.

Okay? And you may have questions about it, but I have never, like I said, in 30 years of doing this work, have ever come across somebody who believes they're going to be bad at it.

Now, I bring that up because we've certainly encountered some people over the course of our lives who, let's just be kind, are not great at their jobs. And we kind of wonder about that disconnect.

How does that happen? I mean, I'm sure when they sat there and were asked all the questions, they must have had the right answers because they got the job. But when we encounter them, it feels like that maybe they didn't have or somebody gave them the answers to the test because they got the job.

Now, again, as you heard me say during the greeting, we have heard and we have experienced people who are less than great at doing their jobs.

[ 5 : 08 ] But most of us, when we think about what we do, even though we're not perfect, we will make mistakes. There are areas of the jobs that we don't particularly enjoy doing.

But I'm willing to bet if I asked each of you to a person, none of you would say, I'm bad at my job. So, with that in mind, let's go back to the question I asked you during the greeting.

Have you ever brought that same assessment, that same attitude, to your job as a disciple of Jesus?

that thought that here's what you are expected to do, that these are the skills involved, and when you sit down at the end of a day, go, I got this.

because the stories we have been covering for the past couple of weeks and we'll cover for the rest of this month are about Jesus talking and teaching the expectations of a disciple.

[ 6 : 30 ] And so, when we get into some of those particular things, the question we have to ask ourselves is how we're doing.

So, today, we got a pretty easy story to look at. And, as you have heard me say pretty much every week for the past month, that it's real easy to figure the story out and to look at the people in the story and go, they shouldn't have done that.

Because the story is pretty self-explanatory. However, the challenge becomes what does this story say to me about me? And if we can't go there, then we're kind of missing the point of Jesus telling the story.

So, today, we're talking about the parable of the ten bridesmaids. And it really gets to this question of being ready. being watchful.

And to understand this parable well, you got to know something about how weddings worked during the first century. So, weddings in this culture during the first century were big, big deals.

[ 7 : 52 ] They could literally last a week. Not kidding. They could literally last a week. Now, the way to understand this is that often a groom would then go to the bride's or the parents of the bride's home.

There'd be some sort of ceremony and celebration there. And then, the bridegroom would leave and there'd be kind of almost a procession through town.

So, there'd be this parade, this kind of celebration where he and the others who were part of the wedding would then go to his house.

It's either the house he's prepared for him and his bride or his parents' house. Remember that thing we used to do with the cans on the back of a car? Remember that thing? It's kind of like that.

Right? It's kind of like that. Now, keep that in mind because when you hear this story, especially if you hear it with a 21st century mind, you're kind of going, what is Jesus talking about?

[ 8 : 57 ] Right? But, knowing that, I want you to hear these opening verses to the story again. At that time, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five of them were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.

The bridegroom was a long time coming so they all became drowsy and fell asleep. All right. So let's reconnect all of that. So, there are these women who are part of the bridal part.

And as we said before, they're waiting for that part, that parade, if you will, to come. that's their job. They're supposed to stand there and be a part of the parade.

Okay? But, whatever's going on at the house can take a certain amount of time and it did often happen at night, the parade, I mean, which is why they needed to have lamps with them.

[ 10 : 08 ] You follow? So, that's why the story clicks for the people Jesus is talking to. Now, the setup is pretty obvious. There's ten of them. Five of them have enough oil with them.

Five of them do not. Okay? So, this is the moment we're in. So, here's the piece of this because those of you who've done and heard this story before, there's a part of this that always used to bother me and we're coming to that right now.

So, if you're following with me, we're at verse six. At midnight, the cry rang out, here is the bridegroom. Come out to meet him. Then all the bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish ones said to the wise, give us some of your oil, our lamps are going out. No, they replied, there may not be enough for both us and you.

Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves. Now, I'm sitting there and I'm trying to figure this out multiple times as I've heard this story and I'm kind of wondering what the big deal is about sharing the oil because it seems like that wouldn't be such a big thing, right?

[ 11 : 26 ] I mean, if you've got some there, you know your job and says, okay, they don't have some, then give them some. But here's the thing.

first, we've got to understand something. That the way I just broke down the story about how weddings worked, so if you're one of these bridesmaids and you knew that this was your job, you knew this is how stuff worked and you knew that it's entirely possible that it could be later than you would expect and you didn't bring any extra oil with you.

So this is a question of, well, how well do you understand your job? Right? There's a second piece that's far more important, though. And like a lot of stories, as we understand, the literal story is one thing.

The deeper meaning of the story is something else. So for those of you paying attention, you already know that the bridegroom in this story is a symbolic representation of Jesus himself. And what Jesus is trying to prep his disciples for is the time when you will not be physically among them.

After he ascends and he's saying, you know I'm coming back, but you need to be watchful. You need to be ready because you do not know when I'm coming. And you need to be about your business until I return.

[ 12 : 59 ] That's the ultimate point of the story. So, we have these bridesmaids. who symbolically represent all of us. Now, here's the thing.

The oil also has a meaning. And the thing about the oil itself is this. The oil is really about your faith.

It's really about your faith. Your faithful actions for Jesus. The much as you love Jesus. Right? And if that's the oil you're supposed to have in your lamp, think about this for a second.

I can't give you my faith. I can't give to, say, Bob. Right? If Bob doesn't have his faith and he hasn't been about his walk, right?

Well, I can't simply do what Bob's supposed to do. he's got his own call on his heart. He's got his own things that Christ wants him to do and that's the oil in his lamp.

[ 14 : 05 ] Right? Everybody with me? And so if that's the case, we can't share oil. We can't share oil. You're supposed to have your own.

That's Jesus' point. You're supposed to have your own. A, because you know the job. This is the job. So if you didn't come prepared to do the job, that's a big strike.

Secondly, if you haven't just been about what you were supposed to do, then that's the other miss. And so here we are.

The bridesmaids who didn't have their stuff, got to go run off and take care of business now. while the ones who are prepared join the parade.

They honor the groom with the responsibility they were supposed to fulfill. They then go into the house, they get in the house, and they close the door.

[ 15 : 13 ] Time for the party. Now here's the second piece of this story that kind of leaves people kind of twisted, right? Because you get there, and the other five come running up.

And so they're pounding on the door. Hey, we're here now, let us in. And you know what the bridegroom says, right? It says, truly, I don't know you. And see, the thing is, I brought that 21st century mindset.

I'm like, how do you not know the people in your own wedding? Right? But that's not really what Jesus is saying. Because what Jesus is trying to tell them is that, remember how this is supposed to work.

That if you've said yes to this relationship, you know what it involves. You know who I am and you know what I'm about. And the fact that you didn't do what you were expected to do at this point, it's not so much that I don't know you.

truth is, you really don't know me. And so this relationship isn't what we thought it was going to be. And that's the challenge.

[ 16 : 34 ] And that's why he's not letting them in. Now, it sounds harsh. but when you break it down to what it's supposed to be about, think back to what we said.

It's that we love this part of faith that is all about what we can receive from Jesus. Jesus is supposed to do stuff for us, is how so many people come to this.

What's Jesus doing for me? Is he granting my prayer requests? Is he forgiving my sins? what Jesus is doing for me? But what we leave out is the part where we're supposed to be doing things for Jesus.

And that brings us back to our first question. Are you doing your job well? And if you think about what God has put on your heart to do, if you think about the things that represent loving God and loving your neighbor well, how are you doing with that?

Do you have any oil in your lamp? Because what Jesus challenges us with is very hard.

[ 18 : 00 ] Right? So the first thing, we got to break this down into three big chunks. Right? So first, do you understand the job? You heard me criticize the bridesmaids for not simply getting the job right.

They didn't know what they were doing. So the question is, do you understand the job? Because if you don't understand the job, then think back to what we were saying at the beginning.

Right? So if you're not clear what it means to be a disciple, my best advice to you, unless I want to hear a really long sermon, my best advice to you is to go back and read the word.

If you want to get it easy, if you want to get it right, Jesus is pretty clear. There are really three things that will tell you what to do. first is the great commandment.

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. We could take that even further, which would be the second thing, which is the love command.

[ 19 : 12 ] Love one another as I have loved you. Then the last piece would be the great commission. Go into the world and make disciples of all nations. That's the job.

love God, love your neighbor, and make disciples. So if you're not clear on what that's about, as I said, there's more detail and you know where to find it.

Second thing you've got to ask yourself is how much oil you got in your lamp? Are you loving and trusting God the way you are supposed to? Are you doing the things that God has called you to do?

What are you bringing to the table? Because if you don't look back and say that you have brought anything to the table, don't be surprised that when it's time to light things up, because here comes the bridegroom, you got nothing to offer.

Lastly, are you being watchful? Are you ready? because that was the challenge he gave them.

[ 20 : 25 ] That was their responsibility. Wait for the bridegroom and then join the parade. Now you could think of that question in multiple ways. There's the biggest way.

The biggest way is the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns and the world changes forever, that's one way to think of it.

Secondly, you could think of it when Jesus comes in your own life. And what I mean by that is when your earthly life will end. Because we like to think that all of us will be able to see this coming.

That we'll be comfortably at a very, very high age in our bed surrounded by loved ones and we'll leave kind of on those terms. We know that's not how the world works.

Some people get that. Everyone does not. And the question that you have to ask yourself is no matter when that comes for you, will you be ready?

[ 21 : 32 ] Are you in your best relationship with Jesus right now? Because we all like to think we will have time to get it together and take care of our business. Check the story, guys.

That's what the story is about. So, if you're not in your best relationship with Jesus right now, what happens when the bridegroom shows up?

Lastly, moving past the second coming, moving past the end of our lives, deeper question is, are you ready for God to show up at any time in your everyday life, period?

I will talk to a lot of people who will say that they are not sure what God wants from them or they are not hearing from God, that I want God to tell me this or show me that or do these types of things.

And so, in the context of what we're talking about, are you really ready for that? In other words, if the bridegroom is coming down the street, are you ready to receive him?

[ 22 : 48 ] See, we get so caught up in everyday stuff, our grocery list, our to-do list, how much we need to put gas in the car, all these sorts of things, where I got to be, what I got to do, and all of that.

And then, God doesn't talk to me anymore. My question is, are you even paying attention? everyone has to grapple with that.

Because if you're not making space, if you're not actually watching for God, how do you know that you haven't seen him?

Let me say that one more time. If you're not actually watching for God, how do you know you haven't seen him? That's kind of the question.

So, be ready. Friends, this may make us a little uncomfortable, and I get that. Because the implication is not one that's all warm and fuzzy.

[ 24 : 00 ] But this is not bad news, guys. Because the thing I want you to hear is this. is that now that it's with you, now that you understand, it's an opportunity for you to take a step forward into being exactly the disciple you hope you can be.

The disciple that Jesus knows you're capable of being. But you have to want to do that. You have to decide that the one who loved you and saved you and guides you still, the one who chose you and revealed himself to you is saying, just be ready.

Because I am with you and I will show up in unexpected ways and at unexpected times, but I'm counting on you to be ready. So do your job well.

Be in prayer. Be in study. Look for him. ask him for opportunities because I trust that if you lift up that prayer, if you know that to be true, God will not disappoint you.

But friends, you have to do your job and do it well. Amen and amen.

[ 25 : 29 ] Loving God, we thank you for the gift it is to know you in these ways, to know that you still trust us with your sacred mission, that you love us in spite of the fact that we are not perfect, that we will make mistakes, that we will fall asleep on the job, that there are times we will let our oil get very, very low.

But your grace continues to pour into each of our lives, and we are so overwhelmed and so thankful. Lord, as we come to you today, we thank you for the ways in which you are working us.

By your spirit, Lord, give us what we need to do this sacred work well. Whatever you have called us to be and do, let us step into it with joy. Let us step into it with faith, knowing that you have given us what we need to be successful.

And let us be watchful. Let us be ready. Amen. Whenever you come. Amen. Amen and amen.

As we have declared, we will serve the Lord. And so as we think of ways in which we might put our faith into practice this week, I want to highlight a few things. First, the business meeting, the charge conference on the 18th.

[ 26 : 51 ] So if you are interested in hearing some annual reports and being a part of some of that action as we talk with our superintendent around our plans for this coming year, join us at 1 o'clock on November 18th.

That is when we'll be holding our charge conference. Now hear this and hear this well. You do not have to be there, but you are welcome to be there. So if you are interested in that, that is next Saturday at 1 p.m.

Second thing, we have our turkey drive, which is still underway, even though we said today was the day. First, let me be the first to thank how generous everyone has been.

We literally have turkeys flowing out of the whole building. It is an odd thing to say, but folks stepped into this and did their part, and that was amazing to see.

In fact, we were talking about we have no idea where we're keeping all these turkeys, right? So that is a testament to how generous and how amazing God is through all of you. But we still have opportunities to be in service, so if you have not yet brought yours in, please do and honor that pledge, okay?

[ 28 : 02 ] Related to that, our serving dinner at Seneca Street UMC, that we need some more folks to look at that sign-up sheet to see some of the goods that we still need.

Luann was here. We took a look at the sheets, and there's still a whole lot for the dinner we don't have covered yet. So look at the sheets and see what you are willing to bring. Also, Saturday morning, Saturday November 18th, is a big prep time.

She needs people to help carve the birds as well as prepare some of these sides. If you can be here around nine o'clock on Saturday, please sign up for that. We need around eight to ten people to do that part.

So if you're able, please step into that. Last thing I will share is that we have Tough Stuff Bible Study this Thursday. This Thursday at seven o'clock. So if you're interested in wrestling with hard questions in scripture, then join us Thursday as we talk about this one.

It's about mending broken relationships. So if you want to see what the Bible teaches us about some of that, feel free to join us on Thursday. There is so much else happening.

[ 29 : 07 ] We don't have time for it, but that's what your bulletin is for. It is a great resource. If you're with us online, you will see that as well. So feel free to sign up for any of those things. Get in touch with us if you have any questions.

Now let's receive our benediction. Loving God, we know that you have given us what we need to do our job well. Let us trust you with all that you have given us and listen for your voice as we watch for you to show up.

And now in the name of God, our Creator and King, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and our Sustainer.

May God bless us as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children. Amen.