

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Matthew 25:1-13 (14-30)

Sermon Title: "The Biblical Principle of Accountability" (Making It Happen)

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{SLIDE 1} God owns us. We are God's people. We are a part of Christ's body. As a part of the body, we have one or a few responsibilities to take on and carry out. God hands us something to do, and we respond positively, proactively.

{SLIDE 2} Our third biblical principle of stewardship is accountability, and we are going to begin with a parable today, the one about ten women waiting for a bridal party. These ten women have only one responsibility: they are to remain in one place and wait for the bridegroom to arrive.

Weddings during Jesus' time were different. Instead of the groom waiting for the bride to come down the aisle, the bride waited for the groom to come down the aisle. More specifically, the bride had to wait for the groom to arrive to "the church," so to speak, and that could take a long time. He could show up in a day or a week. It could take two weeks for him to finally show up.¹ While the groom was doing whatever

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2*, cf. 353.

he was doing – finalizing his business arrangements before getting married, for example – the bride had to wait. One can get bored while waiting, so it was the duty of her bridesmaids to keep her company.

These ten women have one responsibility, remain in one place with the bride and wait with her. Talk to her, dance with her, do her hair 50 more times, whatever it takes. The groom will arrive at some point, so be ready. When the groom does arrive, the second part of their responsibility is to light their lamps and welcome him in. The flames of the lamps light the way for the groom to enter, and this is especially important if it is dark outside. The town doesn't have street lamps, so oil lamps will do.

Okay, so the ten women stay with the bride to keep her company, and they prepare themselves for the arrival of the groom. Jesus focuses on this second part of their responsibility, the lighting of the lamps, and this is where we can talk about accountability.

{SLIDE 3} If we look at the word *accountability*, we see the word *count* toward the beginning. When we count on somebody, we depend on him or her. We put our full trust in the person, and believe that he or she will never let us down. We can always give the person a responsibility, and we know he or she will respond positively all the time. The thing will be completed without fail, and everybody is happy. I once heard a

comedian talk about having “bail money” friends. The idea is that if the comedian was ever in a tough spot, he knows some people who would “bail him out.” The idea applies to anything that we might run into that puts us in a bind, and we need certain people who will take our phone call or text, and get us out of trouble immediately. “Bail money” people are accountable – they will never let us down.

{SLIDE 4} Okay, so the bride and groom are counting on these ten women to do their job. They put full trust in them to keep their lamps lit for when the groom finally arrives. They makes sure they have enough oil. They make sure the wicks do not grow too short. They make sure they can light the things with matches or whatever they used in Jesus’ time. One responsibility is two part, the second being: make sure the lamps are lit.

{SLIDE 5} Simple enough, right? We could probably carry out the job without a problem. But what does Jesus tell us?

They all grow tired, all ten of them.² Maybe even the bride herself fell asleep. There is only so much dancing one can do. There is only so much to talk about and only so many ways to style hair. They all

² Cf. Matthew 25:5.

choose to take a nap, which turns into a deep slumber, because it is nearly midnight, and some people go to bed by 10:00pm.

At this point it seems that all ten bridesmaids are unaccountable. They all fall asleep and so it seems they all cannot be trusted to do the one thing they have been given to do. The groom will arrive, and all ten will be ill-prepared, and there is no way that anybody could count on them for anything else.

{SLIDE 6} And then there is a scream, and the ten women slowly open their eyes and shake their heads. The scream calls out again, “Look, here is the bridegroom!”³ Now the women are frantic. Now they are trying to straighten out their clothes and fix their hair. “Here is the bridegroom,” the voice screams again. “Come out to meet him!”

{SLIDE 7} The lamps! Yes, the lamps. It is dark outside, and we ten women must go out with our lamps and light the way for the groom to enter. This is when we truly discover who is accountable and who is not. Five women still have enough oil to light their lamps and five do not.⁴ Five women are able to light the way for the groom and five are not. All ten might have fallen asleep – even the bride herself may have fallen asleep – and all ten had to be woken by a loud

³ Matthew 25:6.

⁴ Cf. Matthew 25:7-8.

cry. {SLIDE 8} Yet, five of them drop the second part of their responsibility. They did not think of the extra oil that they may need, if the groom comes too late. They have to run out for more oil, and when they return the groom is already inside.⁵ They failed at their job to welcome him in. They did not prove themselves to be “bail money” friends. They proved to be unaccountable.

{SLIDE 9} The main lesson for this parable – the large point Jesus is trying to make – is that we should be ready for the coming of the Lord. We will never know the exact time of Jesus’ second coming, so we should always be prepared. Even when we are sleeping, we should be awakened to his arrival and welcome him in.

For our purposes, we could also extract another smaller lesson from the parable. The biblical principle is accountability. When we are given something to do, we should prove ourselves accountable by doing it. We should prove ourselves ready for the task and able to carry it out in every way we can. We want people to count on us – we want them to look at us and say, “That is somebody I believe in. That is a person who will help in any situation, and if I am in trouble I can always go to that person, because he or she will work with me to relieve all my stresses and strains.” We

⁵ Cf. Matthew 25:9-13.

want people to believe in us, believe in our abilities and talents to solve problems. We like to know that we are wanted, that somebody will give us a responsibility and let us run with it, because they know we will make it happen.

{SLIDE 10} Look to the five women who forgot to bring extra lamp oil. If this parable from Jesus was not about his second coming, and if it was a true story about accountability, do you think those five women would be asked to do anything else? Do you think another bride would call them up and ask to wait with her, while her future husband travels from a long distance? Probably not. Those five women would sadly become a part of the gossip in town. People who point at them and whisper to each other, “Those are the women who failed. Those are the women who could not be accountable for one simple little thing. How sad.”

{SLIDE 11} The thing that happened to them was more than just a sad situation. It was a life-changing event that could not be forgiven. At the end of the parable the five women are left outside. They didn't welcome in the groom, and so when they knock at the door, the answer is, “Truly I tell you, I do not know who you are.”⁶ Nobody will answer for these women.

⁶ Matthew 25:12.

If the parable has to do with Jesus returning to earth and us missing it, nobody will welcome us in. We missed Jesus, and we missed eternal life altogether.

The next parable Jesus tells in Matthew 25:14-30 has to do with servants who are given five talents, three talents, and one talent to invest. The servant with the one talent buries it, so he become unaccountable for the responsibility given to him. When the master comes back for his money, the servant can only produce one talent, while the others have double their investments.⁷ The result for the servant with one talent: he has everything taken from him, including his life, because he is thrown in the dark pit where people wail and gnash their teeth.⁸

{SLIDE 12} What could happen to us for not being accountable? We hope it wouldn't be loss of everlasting life, loss of our Savior and God. We would rather not think about it. We do not want to consider the worst thing that could happen to us, let alone the least bad thing that could happen. Instead, we choose to be accountable.

God counts on us to be his disciples. God counts on us to follow the example of his Son Jesus, and take on the responsibilities given to us. God counts on us

⁷ Cf. Matthew 25:16-27.

⁸ Cf. Matthew 25:28-30.

to carry them out, so that suffering is relieved and relationships are built stronger and God's kingdom flourishes.

We are accountable for the money we give to God's kingdom. It takes money at times to make things happen in and around our church. We are accountable for the time we give to God's kingdom. It takes looking at our calendars and finding an hour or a half a day to join together and make things happen in and around our church. We are accountable for the talents we give to God's kingdom. It takes praying about what God wants us to do and making that calling happen in and around our church. God counts on each of us to give generously of treasure, time, and talent. When we are accountable, wonderful things happen.

We are able to maintain a space for worship study, fellowship, and prayer. Children and youth are able to learn more about God. Adults learn how to be better parents, better spouses, better disciples of God's great kingdom. People are fed, and they are greatly appreciative for the food they can get for their families. People also find a place where they know people will reach out to them, and the love of God fills their hearts to overflowing. God counts on us to be his disciples, so that suffering is relieved and relationships are built stronger and God's kingdom flourishes.

{SLIDE 13} Take one last look at the five women who kept enough oil in their lamps. They may have fallen asleep like the others, but when the time arrived, they were ready. They were given one simple task and they saw it through. The groom approached, and they welcomed him in, and they walked inside with him to be a part of the wedding celebrations. They didn't have to knock on a door and ask permission to enter. They were inside already and everybody knew them well. They were useful. They were "bail money" friends. They were accountable.

Let these women be our example. We would not like to remain outside in the cold. We would rather be inside where our Lord is. We would rather serve our God once, and serve our God twice, and continue to serve until the serving is over. We want God to point to us and say, "I know you. You are my faithful disciple. I can always count on you."

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: God's mercy is poured out like a mighty river. God's grace flows like a never-ending stream. Whatever we have done and whatever we have failed to do are washed away. We are made clean. We are raised up. We are forgiven and set free in the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God, amen.