

Living Life Ready for the Next, Part 3: Jesus Disguised

Matthew 25:31-46 - The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

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Thanksgiving is this week

Mention online giving and matching gifts from your workplace

Introduction

A Bible study group was discussing the unforeseen possibility of their sudden death. The leader of the discussion said, "We will all die some day, and none of us really know when, but if we did we would all do a better job of preparing ourselves for that inevitable event."

Everybody shook their heads in agreement with this comment.

Then the leader said to the group, "What would you do if you knew you only had 4 weeks of life remaining before your death, and then the Great Judgment Day?"

A gentleman said, "I would go out into my community and minister the Gospel to those that have not yet accepted the Lord into their lives."

"Very good!", said the group leader, and all the group members agreed, that would be a very good thing to do.

One lady spoke up and said enthusiastically, "I would dedicate all of my remaining time to serving God, my family, my church, and my fellow man with a greater conviction."

"That's wonderful!" the group leader commented, and all the group members agreed, that would be a very good thing to do.

But one gentleman in the back finally spoke up loudly and said, "I would go to my mother-in-law's house for the 4 weeks."

Everyone was puzzled by this answer, and the group leader ask, "Why your mother-in-law's home?"

"Because that will make it the longest 4 weeks of my life!"

This is probably not the best approach to preparing for eternity.

Today is the third part in our series, “Living Life Ready for the Next” and today we are looking at a story that Jesus told, which describes Judgment Day.

I’m sure you noticed the livestock in our lobby on the way in today. What animals did you see out there? A sheep and goat. Jesus told a story about sheep and goats and it is one of the most frightening and challenging stories in the Bible. Jesus taught it to His disciples less than three days before Calvary. It shows us what we can expect on Judgment Day.

Vss. 31-36

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² 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. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

As Jesus is speaking, He is seated on the Mount of Olives above the valley that the Jews identified as the place of the final judgment (valley of Jehoshaphat) and He describes Judgment Day. He is about to suffer the greatest of all injustices. With that in view, He explains that a day will come when justice will be served.

There is a part of me that takes comfort in knowing that one day God will make all things right. One day there will be justice. In this world there is great injustice. We cannot keep the scores even, no matter how hard we try. If we try, we act with vengeance and create an unbreakable cycle of retribution. I am glad to know that one day, **there will be a judgment. There will be justice.** “For we must all appear before the **judgment seat** of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” – 2 Corinthians 5:10

In this story, Jesus is talking about His role as the judge: “Son of Man” is a title that Jesus used for himself. The King in this story is Jesus.

³⁴ “Then the King 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. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Jesus says to some, “Come” and be rewarded. These will inherit a kingdom. This new kingdom has been an ongoing project ever since the world was created. The book of Revelation calls this the new heavens and the new earth. Jesus said in John 14:2 “I am going to prepare a place for you.” Have you ever tried to imagine what it is going to be like? It is unimaginable. It will be amazing. It will be awe inspiring. We will not go there to sit on clouds and listen to harp music. Our eternity will have great purpose, we will be free from sin and suffering and we will be

enveloped in the presence and love of God.

What did the sheep do to receive this reward?

Notice – **they cared for the King.** They met the needs of Jesus. They reached out to Him and acted compassionately towards Him. They met His basic needs when He was lacking.

This is strange. How could we give anything to the One who needs nothing? The One who created and rules over everything?

Vss. 37-40

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Who are “the least”?

The least are those who are lacking their basic human needs.

The least are Jesus, disguised.

There is an attribute of God that you will not find described in any theology book. I call it “Divine empathy”. In caring for the details of the lives of all people, God feels what we feel. He suffers when we suffer. He identifies with the least. Empathy is the action of vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another.

The least might be **the people that we put at the bottom of our categories of people.** The least are determined by our perception of people.

I know that we like to categorize people and then determine who qualifies for our help.

For example, there are the “temporary homeless” and the “chronically homeless”. You might feel more like helping one group than another. You might help the homeless unless they’re an addict.

Who is the “least” in your classifications of people? A difficult question.

The “sheep” (the ones who are rewarded), are those who:

Fed the least when they were hungry. Fed the Son of Man when He was hungry.

Gave water to the least when they were thirsty. Gave water to the Son of Man when He was thirsty. Mark 9:41 “anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward”

Invited the least in when they needed a place to stay. Invited the Son of Man in when He needed a place to stay. Hospitality – Hebrews 13:2 “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Gave clothes to the least when they needed them. Gave clothes to the Son of Man when He needed them.

Took care of the least when they were sick. Took care of the Son of Man when He was sick.

There lived a remarkable woman in the 14th century. She was the youngest of 23 children, and was deeply religious. At the age of six she claimed to have a vision of Jesus and she gave her life fully to him at the age of seven. She refused marriage, claiming to

be married to Jesus. When the Black Plague swept through her city she ministered to the sick as a nurse and through prayer saw many miraculously healed. Those who died, she personally buried. She was not fearful. She accompanied prisoners to their execution, praying for them as they went. She influenced the pope and the emperors of her day and died before her mid 30s. While others lived fearful lives, she was courageous in her love. Her name was Catherine of Siena.

Visited the least when they were locked away in prison. Visited the Son of Man when He was in prison.

When we love “the least” we are loving God.

So much of our expressions of worship (our songs, prayers and faith are about knowing God. Wanting to see Him. We pray that during our services people would have an encounter with God. We contemplate creation and we see the evidence of His power and nature.

From this parable, we learn that if you long to see God, we can look for Him among the “least”.

You can see Him in the eyes of people. When we care for them, we are unknowingly caring for the son of Man. We are unknowingly, loving God.

Don’t just wait for justice on judgment day - Bring justice to the least.

The actions in this list are small, “doable” things, yet they have an undreamed of significance.

By doing small things with great love we are in fact doing great things.

Verses 41-46

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘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?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

It bothers me that these call him “Lord”. These are religious people. They might even be those who call themselves “Christians”.

Judgment is based on what people do not do. They may have been doing many “things” but they were not doing the things that they should have been doing.

There is so much evil done in the name of religion. There are many who claim to be Christians who do more harm than good for the Gospel.

Faith produces works/actions. The works and actions that really count are the things done in love for the “least”.

This parable is one of the main reasons I believe **“every believer is a minister”**.

We say this from time to time. How true is it?

A minister isn't a person who has "Rev." in front of their name. Ministry is for everyone when ministry is given its true definition:

Ministry: "serving". Meeting needs in Jesus name.

It begins with **the Jesus question: "What can I do for you?"** When you ask the question and respond to their answer, Jesus is working through you. The gifts of the Spirit are made available to you. Ministry takes place. (Consider having people get into groups of 2-3 and have the conversation. Once everyone shares, have them respond by praying for each other).

Conclusion/Application

Look for ways of caring through the holiday season. If you have children, give them the opportunity to grow in works of compassion.

(Early this week in 24 hrs I had someone who needed a place to live, I had a neighbor come to my door at 6:30 a.m. needing a couple eggs, etc.)

Be involved in formal, intentional opportunities: Mission, Betty Chinn, Salvation Army, Crisis Pregnancy, Care Home, Prison Ministry, One Volunteer (Reference the card in the program). Money or time. Teen Challenge. 30 hour famine. There are numerous ministries like this outside of the church. We give to many local ministries as a church. But that is just a part.

Be involved in informal, spontaneous opportunities: Being ready, and wise. Start by serving someone close to you. Use wisdom. Jesus doesn't say "You have money to me when I was panhandling". Offer food, and minister with compassion.

If you want to see God, see Him in the eyes of the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the imprisoned, and the homeless.

If I love God, I will love people. Since I love God, I love people.

The secret to surviving Judgment Day:

True faith is expressed through loving action

What will you do?

I can't eliminate world hunger, but I can eliminate one person's hunger.

I said that this was one of the most frightening and challenging stories in the Bible.

At the end of the world we will not be judged merely by whether or not we said the right words, or believed the right things, or raised our hand, or were a nice person who collectively did more good than bad. We will be judged by this:

"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me."

Is this really difficult to do? I don't think it's difficult, but I also don't think it happens unintentionally. ***It begins with a relationship with Jesus, and then is an expression of His love through us.***

Happy Thanksgiving
Newcomer's gathering after service