

Whose Side Are You On? Matthew 25:31-46

In our world today, “Official” judges exist – elected, appointed, those who are well trained and experienced who judge competitions, those who determine the outcome of a play in a game, and so many more. Then, of course, life is filled with “Unofficial” judges – those wonderful people who are always watching and always commenting on our life. They tell us how we are failing and where we have messed up – and there is no aspect of our life that they don’t judge – harshly.

Jesus didn’t spend a great deal of time talking about the final judgement. But he did mention it and he told a story that would help his disciples and others understand the criteria for judgement – that it won’t simply be an issue of doctrine – but also an issue of ethics.

In Matthew, the 25th chapter – the 31st verse – Jesus said,

“Now when the Son of Man comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

³⁴ “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. ³⁵ I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ “Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

⁴⁰ “Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² I was hungry and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ ⁴⁶ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

Jesus seems to be saying here that when the judgment comes – it won't simply be based on what we say – and what we do – but also on what we don't do.

Jesus says that the separation comes – sheep to one side and goats to the other – based on how our faith has transformed us – and how that is demonstrated in how we live and act. How we treat others and how we share Christ's love.

Jesus is talking about judgement not based on something we promise – but based on something we do - based on how we live as his disciple. And not just when people are watching – but any time – because Jesus is always watching. And when we serve, love, show grace, or extend mercy to someone – it's like we are caring for Jesus himself in that moment.

You probably remember the old children's story that says – one day the Knight's servant went and told a mayor of a small village that the King would be coming to his village. The mayor began to get everything ready. On the day the King was to arrive – the Mayor dressed in his best clothes and waited. But time passed and the king

didn't arrive. No gilded carriage. No fanfare of trumpets. Nothing. The only person who entered the city gate was a beggar who asked the mayor for a drink of water. The mayor told the beggar that he didn't have time for him and told him to get away and to get out of sight.

At the end of the day – the mayor was still standing there alone. No King. He sent a messenger to the Knight's servant and asked him what went wrong – why did the king NOT come to his village. And, of course, the servant wrote back – “The king is traveling the country in disguise as a beggar because he wants to see what people are really like.”

I mean, come on, if the servant would have said – look – the king will visit – but he's dressed as a beggar – I'm sure the mayor would have treated him wonderfully.

When do we encounter Christ? – in everyone we meet.

What if we approached life – and approached each other – and approached strangers – by seeing Christ in the other person? How different would life be?

Jesus is giving us a “heads up” on this – telling us that how we treat one another – that will be on the final exam.

Who would ever have thought that simple acts of love and kindness would carry so much weight on the final day?

“Being ready” for Jesus’ return involves us doing the things we know to do as His disciples – and here Jesus is saying that when judgement comes – things like love, compassion, and kindness about going to be part of the assessment of our life.

I think what always gets me about this parable is that it isn't focused on us being judged based on the bad things that we do. Yes – following Jesus means that our lives are changed and through the Holy Spirit we rid ourselves of bad habits and misplaced priorities. But this parable is showing another part – another aspect of discipleship. This parable says that those who are denied entrance to the Kingdom at the final Judgement – well – it’s because “I was thirsty and you gave me no water, I was in prison and you never came to see me, I was without clothes and you never gave me any.” It’s not just what we do – but as

disciples – it's also matters what we DON'T do – what we omit – what we ignore.

I'm afraid **There are many in church who are good, decent, and respectable people, but who are not doing anything for Christ.**

It's like the parable of talents that Jesus told. The man in the story is entrusted by the King with a large sum of money – and rather than do something great with it – doubling it – transforming the world with it – he took it and buried it. In that parable – that man faces the same judgement as the goats in this parable. And why is he treated so harshly? Not because he gambled the money away, or frivolously spent it, or used it to intentionally hurt others, but because he did nothing with it.

Those on the left-hand side – our goat people - are kept out of the Kingdom, not because of what they did but because of what they failed to do. And you notice that they didn't say that they didn't know there were hungry or thirsty or hurting people that they were ignoring – they just didn't know the people they were ignoring were Jesus.

What if – starting today – we ask God every day to help us to see and treat each person as though it was Christ? Whether it's someone we know or don't know – the person across the breakfast table or the person in the store line. The child we drop off at school or the kid we see in the park. The person we work with or the person begging by the onramp.

If Kindness, compassion, mercy, grace, and love are going to be part of the criteria that Jesus cares about – then what if we started to care about them as well?

I think it could change our world.