

**Loving the Least**  
**Matthew 25:31-46**

One of the things that was really cool about this week is that my boys got to ride with me every day to work because they were taking part in the sports camp. So, I got a little extra time with them this week.

But one of the things I do in preparation for my sermon is I listen to what some of my favorite preachers have to say who have preached on the same text and I mainly do it to make sure that I'm not totally off on my understanding of the passage. But if I was listening to it, that means my sons were listening to it. And these weeks passage of course is talking about Christ's final judgment.

And so, one of my sons says Dad, is there going to be an end of the world? And I could tell that there was a bit of fear in his voice and so I tried to explain and reassure him that yes there will be an end but that God is going to make a new heaven and a new earth and those who belong to him will live with him forever in the new earth.

But it reminded me of when I was a child and that I had the same fear in me when I realized that one day there would be an end to this world and a final judgment. And I realize that there are many people who still have that same kind of fear or hesitation whenever we start talking about these things and so they avoid these passages.

But what I realized is the more I read the bible, the more that fear was released and the more I embraced and look forward to Christ's second coming. In fact, for Christians the end is not something to be feared, but embraced, its supposed to be what we are longing for.

Perhaps some of our fear and hesitation is because deep down we feel we aren't yet ready, perhaps deep down we hold onto this world just a little too tightly. But understand that Jesus warns us about the end so that we would be ready and we won't be caught off guard, and easing our fears. We aren't really helping by avoiding such topic, but in fact we are making a mistake by not preparing ourselves.

In our passage this morning Jesus is going to tell us what it going to be like at the final judgment. He gives us an image of all nations standing before him and this great separation that takes place and he compares it to shepherd who separates his sheep and his goats. But he does it with the same motivation for every other parable that we have looked at over these weeks. He warns us so that there will be no surprises, he warns us so that we will be ready.

What does it mean to be ready for Christ's return? Turn with me to Matthew 25 as we seek one last time this week to answer that question.

Matthew 25:31-46

Perhaps the first thing you might notice this morning is that this isn't a parable in the traditional sense. There is no the kingdom of heaven is like or in that day it will be like. In fact, the only thing that is parabolic about it would be the reference to the sheep and the goats in verse 33. Rather what we have here is Jesus giving us a glimpse of what it will be like at the judgment of his Second coming. There is no imagery used here, no hidden meaning he is straight forward with his message that he is trying to get across.

Jesus is coming, that's been the theme of this whole portion of his Olivet Discourse in chapters 24 and 25. Jesus is coming, he is returning and in this portion of Matthews gospel Jesus has been urging us to be ready. 24:44 Jesus said **Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**

So, we've been asking what does he mean be ready? He makes that's statement in verse 44 and then he gives us a series of parables to teach us exactly what he means when he says be ready. And so, at the end of chapter 24 he gives us a short parable about a faithful servant, who stays obedient and serving his master right up until his return to teach us that being ready means faithful obedience.

In chapter 25 he gave us the parable of the Ten Virgins and we found that 5 of those young ladies were ready for the grooms coming because they made preparations ahead of time, where five were foolish and didn't have what they needed. Being ready means to prepare ourselves ahead of his return.

And then last week we looked at the parable of the Talents, about 2 servants who took what the master had given them and put it to work to multiply his property and we found that being ready for Christ's return is using the blessings and the giftings he has given us and putting them to work for his kingdom. (go online) Working until he comes.

And here in our passage this morning we are given another clear piece of what it means to be ready. Loving the least. Loving those in need. Jesus shows us here that those who are ready for his return are those who demonstrate love towards the least in this life.

But he starts by telling us what his second coming will be like. Jesus is coming and he is coming in glory. Jesus is coming in glory.

## **GLORY**

Verse 31 **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne."**

Jesus is coming, but his second coming will not be like his first coming, it will not be as a meek and mild infant born in a manger, he will not be coming in obscurity for only a few to know, but he is coming and the world will see his glory. Jesus is coming in glory and that's really communicated by the title the Son of Man.

We hear him refer to himself often in Luke's gospel as the Son of Man, and usually what that is communicating is Jesus' humanity, but that's not what he wants us to picture here in this scene, rather this title the Son of Man is meant to draw us back to Daniel's description of the Son of Man in Daniel 7.

The one whom the Ancient of Day God almighty gives this Son of Man "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him and his dominion we are told will be an everlasting dominion which will not pass away and his kingdom will be a kingdom that will not be destroyed. This is the son of man that we are to have in mind here.

The Son of Man coming all his glory and this glory is a divine glory. The deity of Christ is clearly on display, Jesus is coming as the divine king, do you see it? Listen God alone is glorious, and we are told that he does not share his glory with another and yet here is Jesus coming in his own glory and verse 31 tells us that he isn't seated on a throne, but on his glorious throne. He has his own glory and his own glorious throne.

And who will be with him, some of the angels, no verse 31 tells us all of the angels will be with him and who will stand before him, some of the people, no all of the people, all the nations are gathered before him. And notice verse 34 he isn't a king but he is the king, the one and only true king.

Do you see? Do you see the glory, Jesus is coming in all his glory, he is coming as the glorious son of man to sit upon his glorious throne and all of the angels in heaven will be gathered around him and every person, from every tribe, nation and tongue will be gathered before him and he will be the king?

This is the scene that Paul tells us about in Philippians 2 when **every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Jesus is coming and he is coming in all his glory. But he is coming as the judge.

## **JUDGE**

Jesus is coming, and he is coming as the judge.

Second half of verse 31. **he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.**

His glorious throne also serves as a judgment seat and we are told that all the nations will stand before him. That is all the people who have ever lived, wherever or whenever they have lived, whatever nationality, will stand before the great throne of judgment.

And we are told that a separation will take place, he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

The sheep will be placed on his right hand, the right hand represents blessings, power and honor. The goats on his left, representing cursing and dishonor.

Jesus is using the image of a shepherd here. Shepherds often have both sheep and goats as part of their flock and they usually can graze together. But when night fall comes the shepherd usually has to separate the sheep from the goats because goats become restless in the cold weather, they prefer the heat.

You understand the image that Jesus is trying to give us, night fall is coming, come to him in faith while there's still time, repent while it is still day, while there is still light. For when the night falls that's when the great separation takes place, he will separate the sheep from the goats.

And maybe you envision him sort dividing a line down the middle, or dividing the people like God divided the Red Sea, but it's the way its worded here verse 32 says **he will separate them one from another.**

I remember just this past week at the Sports Camp I saw one of the coach's separating the teams before they played a game. Lucas on this team, Meagan on that team, Elijah on this team, Riley on that team. Separating the one from another, or one at a time. It means this division doesn't take place collectively in a group, but one by one we will stand before the Great Throne of judgment and Jesus will separate us.

But of course, I mean here' what we want to know, what makes a person a sheep or a goat, how is it that Jesus is going to separate them, especially when we find out the fate of each group. For the sheep verse 34 tells us are to **inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**

But the goats verse 41 are **to be cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**

This is a matter of life and death, eternal blessing or cursing, listen there can't be anything more important than this, than where we will spend the rest of eternity, with Christ in his Kingdom or separated from him for all eternity in eternal fire. What else is more important?

What is it that separates the sheep and the goats? Well Jesus tells us. To the sheep on his right, he says 34 **'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.** <sup>35</sup> **For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,** <sup>36</sup> **I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'**

And we read that the sheep are surprised and they go on and ask Lord when did we do these things? When did we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick and in prison and Jesus answers them in verse 40 **And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, <sup>[1]</sup> you did it to me.'**

## SHEEP

The sheep love those in need (REPEAT) the sheep who inherit the kingdom of God are those who are loving those in need.

And the question that we have to ask is what is Jesus teaching here? Is he teaching salvation by works? Is he teaching that one can earn their way into heaven by doing these good deeds? If so, then let's all get our pens out and make a checklist and get out there this week. Okay, so feed someone who is poor, check, alright now I gotta find someone who is in dire thirst ah yes there someone over there, if only I could find a stranger who needs a place to stay, got it check.

No, we know that Jesus isn't teaching that we earn heaven by doing these good deeds, because anyone can do these deeds and not mean it. Anyone can feed the poor and not care about them. Anyone can do these things without their heart being in it.

But not only that, but remember verse 34 these sheep are inheriting this kingdom. When you inherit something, it passed down to you not because you've earned but because someone has left it to you. You cannot earn something that is inherited so what is Jesus saying, what is the connection between these works and entering into his Kingdom.

Well, it's the same thing that he's been showing us all the way through all of our parables. Being a follower of Christ is more about our walk than it is about our talk. No, these good works, these good deeds cannot earn you heaven, these good works cannot save you, but these good works are the evidence that Christ is living in you. The good works are evidence that you have been saved, that you have been transformed that the love of God is working in your life.

I mean the thing to notice is that these people are surprised when Jesus says this. Right.. verse 37 **Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'**

Jesus poses to them that they have done and their response is oh yeah, whew good things I did all those things, no, it's like when did all this take place. See what that tells us is that these acts of love were just everyday occurrences. These people showed love naturally, it was a natural overflow out of their lives. It wasn't something they worked hard at, it was just the way they lived, you saw someone in need you helped them.

Because Jesus Christ was living in their hearts, they were not forced to show love to those in need it just came naturally to them.

This is the Good Samaritan right. The man walking down the street seeing a man in need, that has been beaten within an inch of his life and robbed for all of his money and left for dead, that while all the others just walked on by and acted like they didn't see him, this one Good Samaritan had compassion on him and so instead of passing by he goes and he tends to his wounds and he gives him medicine, but he didn't stop there he took him and put him on his

animal and brought him to a place where he could rest and heal and he paid out of his own pocket enough money to cover whatever the man needed.

Why so that he could gain eternal life, no because it was the overflow of God's work in his heart and in his life.

The sheep love those in need... Do you know what Jesus is saying here, do you know what he is teaching?

He's teaching what he has said so many other times in places like **John 13:34**

**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.** Love is the evidence, the proof that you belong to me. It's the same as James teaching that faith without works is dead.

How do I know I have love? Because when you see your brother or your sister hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick, when you see your brother or sister in need you don't turn you back, you reach out a hand and help. That's how you know you have love.

What's interesting as well is what's not on this list. Notice what Jesus doesn't say, Come inherits the kingdom to those who prayed and fasted, to those who attended church or tithed, or preached a great sermon, there aren't any seemingly religious works mentioned, not even faith is mentioned. Only love abides, because love is the true test of faith. Love is the proof, the evidence of your faith.

And you might say, yeah but there are a lot of people who do these kinds of things who aren't Christians, what about them?

Notice two things about what Jesus says in verse 40 **'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,<sup>[1]</sup> you did it to me.'**

Notice that he says you did it to me, what you've done for these people that are in need you've done it to me. These aren't just random acts of kindness, but these are acts of love done in the name of Christ. What Jesus is saying is that in doing these acts of love you have embraced me. You've done these acts as a demonstration of my love in your life.

But the other thing is to notice that Jesus says one of the least of these, my brothers. My brothers. Who are Jesus' brothers that he has in mind? Well, its believers, those who are a part of the family of God.

No Jesus isn't teaching that we should have no regard for those outside the church, in fact he teaches the very opposite in other parts, but he does teach that we should have a special kind of love, a special kind of affection for those who are a part of his family.

Yes, love your neighbor, but the command is to love and serve one another. They will know you are my disciples if you love one another, not the world, but one another. These aren't just random acts of kindness to the world, yes, we are commanded to care for the lost and broken of this world and that is a display of love,

But what I'm saying is that's not what's in focus in this passage before us, this is how we treat each other in the family of God, because if you love God, surely you love his children.

The sheep who inherit the kingdom of God are those who love those in need.

But what about these goats? Verse 41

**Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'**

And again, we see the same surprise, when did we see you in such a state, Lord surely if we saw you like that we would have helped and Jesus' response is verse 45 **Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'**

## **GOATS**

The goats are those who reject Christ (repeat)

See if the actions of the sheep reveal the true state of their heart, if the love of the sheep display their embracing of Christ, then the inaction of the goats reveal the state of their heart, they've rejected Christ.

In rejecting those who are in need these goats have rejected Christ, that's the issue.

The issue isn't so much that they haven't cared for the hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger or sick, but because they haven't by their actions, they have rejected Christ. And that's an important distinction to make.

Because there are a lot of people in this world who would never say they have rejected Christ, but the actions of their life reveal their rejection. And the same can be said that there are many in the church who claim they have embraced Christ, but the actions or rather inaction in their life reveal a different story.

The goats are those who have rejected Christ not necessarily in word but in action. Our actions reveal a lot about the state of our heart. We can say and claim anything we want, but our actions tell the truth on us.

I can claim that I love my wife and children, but my actions will prove the true state of my love.

We have to have in the back of our minds Jesus words all the way back in Matthew 7 when we read this passage. **Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**

Its not what you say, "Lord, Lord" its what you do "the will of my Father". Not every who says, to me Lord, Lord will enter the Kingdom, but the one who does, the will of my father.

That's exactly what Jesus is teaching us here just in expanded form. Its not what you say, but what you do, because what you do reveals the true state of your heart. By the actions of love of the sheep, they show their embracing of Christ, but by the inaction of goats reveal their rejection of Christ.

And we see their fate and it should be a sobering fate for us all, I take no pleasure in teaching and preaching about it, but understand that I must because Christ did.

Hell is a real place and Jesus spoke about hell more than anyone. And the truth that Christ makes crystal clear here is that those who embrace him by faith will when he returns inherit the kingdom of God and they will be eternally blessed.

But to reject Christ is death and hell. And he tells us exactly what hell is here.

Hell is eternal separation from Christ, Jesus says **Depart from me**. This isn't just a get out of my face, but it is actually a curse. To be separated from Christ is to be separated from joy, from life, from any kind of blessing. Hell is eternal separation from Christ.

But look what else he says **'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**. Hell is an eternal fire, now whether you take that as literal fire or a figurative fire, it is clear that what Jesus is trying to communicate is an eternal suffering. Hell is eternal suffering.

IN verse 45 these will go away into eternal punishment, these are the words of Christ hell is a place of eternal separation from Christ, a place of eternal suffering and eternal punishment.

Here's what we don't see that some would teach, some would teach that after death that we all get a second chance, but that's not what we see here, we get one life and that after that we stand before the judgment of Christ and based upon this life, we are either a part of the Kingdom or a part of eternal fire.



And some would teach that for those who reject Christ that there will be an annihilation, meaning they will cease to exist, but Jesus is clearly teaching that hell just as much as heaven is an eternal place.

And by now many of us are twitching in our seats, we don't want to talk about judgment, we don't want to talk about hell and eternal suffering, and listen neither do I. But Jesus did.

Why? I mean isn't Jesus supposed to be about love and forgiveness. And the answer is yes, he is. Jesus is about love and Jesus is about forgiveness. In fact, it's out of love and forgiveness that he warns us about the reality of hell and judgment.

How loving would it be for us if we knew that our children were headed for danger and not warn them about it. Don't we as parent warn our children about the dangers of their choices in life? Isn't it loving for us to warn our children about the dangers of drinking and driving, the dangers of drugs, the dangers of sex before marriage? Don't we out of love warn our children about the consequences of their choices, knowing that they still have to make the choice themselves?

It is out of love not anger that Jesus warns us about the consequences of our choices. But he did more than warn us. He provided a way of escape. He did more than warn us, he provided a way that we might be saved from the coming judgment.

In fact, he laid his life down, he took our sin on him, he took on the punishment for our sin upon the cross, so that when we stand in that day of judgment knowing we've done nothing to deserve to enter God's kingdom, we can stand in confidence because we have trusted in the work of Christ.

The only thing we can boast in is not in anything that we have done in this life, it won't be in the feeding of the hungry, the caring for the sick, clothing the naked, we won't stand there on judgment and say look what I have done, but look what Christ has done.

He went to the cross on my behalf, laid his life down in my place and he rose from the dead so that I can have eternal life.

Jesus is about love and out of love he warns us and provides a way for us to be saved.

What does it mean to be ready for the return of Christ? It means to love the least. To love those in need.

And I can confess that I was more than convicted after spending a week engulfed in this passage. Because if you're like me you look at the list that Jesus gives us here and say wow, I fall so short. How often I confess God of my hard heartedness towards those in need.

I have visited the sick, but I can't say that I have fed the hungry, I have opened up my home to those in need, but I can't say that I have visited those in prison, I can't say that I have clothed the naked. Maybe you're looking at that list and feeling a little worried this morning.

Here's what I think we can all confess; we could all be more loving to those in need. And so maybe your prayer is much like mine as I worked through this passage this week, Lord make me more loving, give me a greater heart for those in need. If this is what you are calling for those who follow you Lord, I want to see more of it in my life.

But also, I would say realize this isn't meant to be an exhaustive list, in fact Jesus in his life never did all the things he mentions. Jesus fed the hungry and thirsty, he visited the sick, but there is no record of him visiting those in prison, no record of his opening up his home, because he had no home.

The question we should be asking isn't have I done all the things that Jesus lists, but is the love of God on display in my life and in my actions?

Who are the sheep that Jesus mentions here? It is those who have embraced Christ not just in word, but in action. The sheep who love those in need. And that's what it means for us as Christians to ready for Christ return. To know the love of God is in our hearts, because it is displayed in our lives. To be ready is to love those who are in need.