



Loving Jesus, Loving People, Plowing a Counter-Culture

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 25: 31-46

KEY POINT: True faith is shown in our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

FOR LEADERS

- **Apprenticeship!** *As a Gospel-centered church, it's our hope that Emergence would be the leadership locus of our community, and as a Community Leader, you are very much on the front lines of that! Who are you personally investing in? Who in your group could lead in their own right if you gave them the proper guidance and encouragement? Pray about who God has placed around you and consider what a next step in their faith, their leadership and their ministry might be today*

GETTING STARTED

[1] Communities Video: Watch this week's community extras video!

[2] Icebreaker: What is the most loving thing anyone has ever done for you?

[3] Opener: What stood out to you from the sermon this week? Did you find anything particularly helpful or eye opening?

JESUS THE JUDGE

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 25: 31-46.

While many people realize the Bible teaches that this judgment will come, but perhaps less realize that it is actually Jesus himself who will sit as judge.

- [1]** Consider that this text begins with the Son of Man (Jesus) in his "glory." When most people think about Jesus, do you think they typically see him in glory or otherwise? Why is that, do you think?
- [2]** How comfortable do you think people are with the side of Jesus that comes in glory as judge over all?
- [3]** In what way should knowing this side of Jesus affect our relationship with Him? What implications should this have for us?
- [4]** What do you think our attitude should be toward the notion that Jesus will one day judge us?
- [5]** Does the standard of judgment in verse 40 seem gracious when you first read it? What about verse 45? Do you think they are the same standards or different, and what are the implications of that?
- [6]** What do you think it means to be "watchful" in relation to the coming Son of Man in his glory?
- [7]** How watchful do we feel we are? What would we need to do to be more watchful?

SHEEP AND GOATS

In our passage this week, Jesus uses imagery of a shepherd separating sheep and goats to explain the final judgment that will come at the end of the age.



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- [8]** Why do you think Jesus uses the imagery of sheep and goats here? What impressions or details come to mind when we picture a shepherd with sheep and goats?
- [9]** How should our impressions of sheep and goats impact our understanding of this text? What core principle(s) do you think we are meant to take away from this?
- [10]** How do you think Christian readers are meant to respond to this story? What about non-Christians?

“I WAS HUNGRY...”

- [11]** The Bible is clear that we are called to love anyone in need (even enemies) but, in our passage this week, Jesus narrows these acts of love to specifically concern disciples in his portrayal of the final judgment. Why do you think this might be?
- [12]** Have you ever personally thought of your actions (or non-actions) towards Jesus’ disciples as actions toward Jesus himself? How might that simple reality change the way in which we minister to people?
- [13]** What are some of the biggest examples of Christians love for one another that you’ve seen?
- [14]** Where do you feel that Christians can tend to fall short of the kind of love for one another that Jesus speaks of in this passage?
- [15]** Have you ever personally struggled with a lack of assurance that your faith in Christ is genuine? What kinds of things should help us to point to whether we are truly a child of God?

PRAYER

- [1]** Pray that Jesus would kindle a deep and genuine love in your heart for fellow believers
- [2]** Pray that the Lord would provide you with ample opportunity to put that love into action.

LEADER’S COMMENTARY

- This is the final section of a large block of Jesus’ teaching that began in chapter 24. One of the major themes throughout the entire discourse has been that we need to “be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an our you do not expect” (24:44). This is certainly a major component of the three parables that precede this week’s text. Until now, however, Jesus has been fairly vague about what being ready means. This week he clarifies that at least a major component of what we are supposed to be doing is living out our love for one another in very practical ways.
- Question 11 asks why Jesus speaks narrowly here of our love for fellow disciples. There are several very big answers to this question, but at the heart, the all stem from the fact that the call to follow Jesus is a call to be part of a community of people who are joined together in a bond of love, both for Christ and for one another. This call is not optional, and it is not an incidental add-on to our faith. As John tells us, “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20).
- The doctrine of God’s final judgment of unbelievers is indeed a difficult one. Here are a few suggestions for thinking through it:

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- A common trend in contemporary Christian thinking is to try to “defang” the doctrine of hell as much as possible, in an attempt to make it palatable to postmodern sensibilities. What is needed is balance and biblical accuracy. While it is certainly easy to go beyond the biblical evidence in portraying God’s judgment of the wicked as eternal physical torture, it is also easy to overcorrect in the other direction as well. Jesus did not shy away from using terms such as “weeping and gnashing of teeth” and “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Whatever these expressions, and others like them, are meant to describe, it is horrible and should kindle in us a passionate fear of judgment, channeled in a healthy direction that leads to repentance.
- One common falsehood that is repeated time and again in modern evangelicalism is that God treats all sin the same, and that the punishment for all unsaved individuals is exactly the same. Not only is this unjust, it is also profoundly unbiblical. The Bible clearly teaches degrees of punishment that correspond to varying levels of guilt. This is evident in passages such as Matthew 11:22, which says that “it will be more bearable on the day of judgment” for the cities of Tyre and Sidon than it will be on those who rejected Christ’s earthly ministry in the villages of Chorazin and Bethsaida, or John 19:11, where Jesus speaks of the “greater sin” of the one who handed him over to his accusers. See also Luke 12:47–48, and 2 Peter 2:20–22.
- God treats no one unjustly or unfairly. People are judged for conscious acts of evil done in willing defiance against the one who loves us and has given us everything. The classic statement of this is in Abraham’s dialogue with God in Genesis 18:25: “Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is right.”
- There is legitimate debate among Christian theologians regarding the nature of punishment in hell, as well as its duration. Much depends on how literally one takes the many biblical descriptions of God’s judgment.

Another line of debate concerns hell’s purpose. Is it strictly punitive, or is it somehow purgatorial, in which hell exists to either induce people to repentance unto salvation, or to somehow purify those who die in a state of insufficient holiness (the latter resembles Catholic belief in purgatory).