

Hanging Out With Jesus: What Does It Look Like To Follow Jesus In Practice?

Unedited Transcript

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

Good morning, men! Welcome to Man in the Mirror's Men's Bible Study, where we always have room for another guy. The other day Patsy and I were taking two of our grandkids over to see their great grandparents. Patsy's mother is in a healthcare facility, and so in the same spirit with which parents take their children through the book *My First Airplane Ride*, so that they won't be scared when they get on the plane, Patsy decided to prep our two grandkids for the visit at the healthcare facility (what they used to call nursing homes). She went through all the expectations and so forth, and what the kids would see. So we walk into the facility and to the cafeteria, and our three year old grandson says at the top of his lungs hey that lady's legs are broken! They don't work! So I needed a segue into our talk today. A lot of people in the world today, they look at Christianity and they say hey! That's broken! That doesn't work! And the reason for that is that a lot of times, those of us who are believers really don't have this settled confidence about what it really means to walk out our faith with Jesus in practice. That's what we're going to look at this morning.

A couple of things first. We have twelve Area Directors in town this week for Boot Camp, the final training they take before they become activated. These men are from all over the United States. So Area Directors, if you could just stand where you are and let these men show you some appreciation for your service. From Oregon to Maine to California, Texas, Indiana... Every place, all over from coast to coast. What an honor to be associated with you men! Thank you for being here this morning! We probably have some other first time visitors, so if you're a first timer we'd like to welcome you, too. If you could just raise your hand where you are. One the count of three, let's give a hand clap to our first time visitors. One, two, three! Glad you're here! Also, we have a little shout out today. We've got a group of guys called United Methodist Men of Rocky Mount United Methodist in Rocky Mount, VA. This is a group of men that has been meeting for ten years on Sundays at 9:00 am using the video Bible Study. Larry Toohey is their leader, and I wonder if you would join me in giving these men a warm Man in the Mirror welcome? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys! We're glad to have you with us!

What Does This Parable Mean, And Not Mean?

So the title of the talk today in our series Hanging Out With Jesus is What Does It Look Like To Follow Jesus In Practice? We're going to be looking at the parable of the sheep and the goats. First, we want to look at what does this parable mean, and what does it not mean. The idea here is to give us an insight into what is important and how to actually practice what's important from Jesus' perspective as it relates to his kingdom. When we meet here on Friday mornings, we're trying to accomplish three things. You've heard me say many times that the greatest lesson that I've ever learned is that there is a God we want, and there is a God who is. They are not the same God, and the turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is. Each week here at Bible Study, we're trying to do three things: 1) We're trying to help each other see a little larger glimpse of the God who is. 2) We're trying to jettison a little piece of the God or Gods we have wanted. 3) Because this is an

application oriented Bible Study, we're trying to help men connect the dots between what's going on in the Bible and what's going on in their day to day lives. This is a particularly good lesson for accomplishing all three of those things in a major way. So the promise is you're going to have more clarity about how to lead that holy life of sacrifice and service that ultimately every Christian man wants. Even if you don't want it fully now, some day you will. If you're early in your faith, even though you may not want it now, you know that's ultimately what you're going to want. So let's take a look at this parable and see what it means and doesn't mean.

Matthew 25:31

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.

So what are we talking about here? What is this about? This is what's referred to in Revelations 20 verses 11 and following as the great white throne judgment. There is a judgment that takes place at the end of the age. There is a text, this is a parable, and a parable uses metaphorical terms. Sheep and goats and so forth. But there is a passage that just gives a very clear, linear sort of explanation in Hebrews 9:27. Keep your finger here and let's turn there. It's just a good, concrete two verses that give a good explanation of this judgment.

²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,...

So every man when he dies does face a judgment.

²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

So that's the purpose of this judgment, it's to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. That's what Jesus is talking about, there's a separation that takes place at the judgment. There ends up being two classes or groups of people: those who are in Christ and those who are not. It might do some violence to the way you think about it, but is it not fair and is it not logical that whomever a man would choose as his master now, he will be reunited with him later? So don't be upset about the theology of a separation from God, we'll talk more about that. Elsewhere, we have other parables. The wheat and the tares that are allowed to grow with each other. Then at the end they are separated and put in bundles and so forth. Again, it's that kind of thing that Jesus is doing here.

What is the basis of this judgment? When you appear before this throne, and again I believe that's metaphorical, others believe it's literal. I don't know, they've been arguing about it for thousands of years and we're not going to settle it today, but when we appear before Jesus, what will be the basis of your judgment? For that, let's take a look at verses 34 and following.

³⁴ "Then the King (that's Jesus) 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 (It's always been God's plan to have this kingdom). 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.'

So what is the basis of this judgment? The basis of how we're judged is how we treat these people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, without clothes, in prison and so forth. By the way, just so we're very clear, this is a representative list. This is not the six articles of mercy, nor the six articles of charity. Do these six things alone and all. It's merely representative, it could be lots of things. It might be giving comfort to someone whose child has died. That means just as much you see, an act of mercy. Maybe I met this guy at the gym who is unemployed. I wanted to build a relationship with him, he has a Master's in land planning. I got some contacts in that area, so I said why don't you send me a resume. I connected him with a couple of guys and sure enough someone is interested in interviewing him. I talked to him again the other day, and you know when you see how vulnerable a person is when they're unemployed, just how vulnerable and fragile they are, that's an act of mercy. That's discipleship! When God puts somebody in your path who is stuck, discipleship means finding out why they're stuck and helping them solve that problem! All this is is discipleship! It's giving attention to those people in need that God brings into your life to cross your path. Just one more thing, think of it as an attitude or mindset, not a checklist.

Next, who are these people? Verse 37.

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.'

These people are surrogates, they're representatives or stand ins for Jesus. In fact, if you want to keep your finger there and look at Hebrews 13:2, it says:

² Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Ever since I first read that a long time ago, I believed that's true. When I meet somebody who is the least of these, somebody knocking on my door looking for a handout, which happens in my neighborhood, I open the door and I wonder is that person an angel? When I see somebody begging for money at an exit ramp, then I look at some and think I don't think so! These people, they're stand ins for Jesus Christ. When you did it to the least of these, you did it to me. We had a man come to the Bible Study once, and I've told this story before I'm sure. He said that all his life all he ever wanted to do was be a high school math teacher. Then he got the job and he said the first thing he noticed was that his students were coming to class with problems that math can't solve. He developed a vision for how to help these young people, many of whom were coming from fatherless or broken homes, and how to mentor these young students of his. A man came to the Bible Study once and he said he met a man at a Bible Study one evening at his church and the guy said you look familiar to me do you work in my office building? He smiled and said yes, I do. I'm a disciple of Jesus disguised as your janitor. The idea of just visualizing that your job, your opportunity is what is being talked about here in this text. So here's the Big Idea for today: **What does it say about us if we don't help a person in need when it is in our power to act?** A little interrogative.

Now, this is not meant to guilt you, because the reality is that every man here is here because he is trying to lead a life that is pleasing to God. You already are leading a life that is pleasing to God, and the idea of setting up this idea that there's just one more thing you need to do to make God happy or avoid his wrath; that's not what this is about! This is as much about helping you see that you are already doing what it is that Jesus wants you to do and practice. For some, a few of you, yes it will be a wake up call to make a change in what you are doing.

Let's talk about what happens to the goats, verse 41 and following.

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.

Almost every scholar, theologian, does not believe that fire is a literal fire but that fire is a metaphor. We don't know what hell is! Really we know very little about hell. We know quite a lot about heaven, but there's far more that we don't know than we do know. But it is eternal, about that there is no mistake.

⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat (I wonder if that person was an angel!), 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."

There is a theology of hell. It's unsettling, it's disturbing. I find it that way, don't you? But in humility, let us accept that if we knew what God knows that we would agree with God. That's what humility is, it's realizing that we don't have the answer, we don't understand, we can't understand, and what seems like a violence to us, well, if we understood what God understood then we would accept it just the same. The Big Idea, **What does it say about us if we don't help a person in need when it is in our power to act?** Structured just this way because this is an application oriented Bible Study! We're not trying to just teach theology and doctrine, we're trying to figure out how to put this into our lives!

What doesn't this mean? Three things. This doesn't mean we are saved by works. This text does not mean that we are saved by works. We are saved by faith and judged by our deeds and works. Salvation by faith but judgment by works. We are judged by our works, that's what this is all about here. Two, works do not equal faith. In other words, if you do good works, that is not faith. Faith is something else. Three, it does not mean work is more important than faith. It doesn't mean work is more important than faith, they are both extremely important. If I could change one thing about human nature, it would be this idea that everything has to be this or that instead of both and. Usually, there is multiple things that something is. There's not one thing that makes you successful, there are multiple things that make you successful, right? In Christianity, it's not just works, it's also faith. It's our work for God but also our walk with God. In fact, our work for God will always be a reflection of our walk with God. So if you don't have faith, you won't have work! Philipp Melancthon, Martin Luther's lieutenant said justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. It's faith and works or as Sproul would say, faith equals

salvation plus works. Not faith plus works equals salvation, but faith equals salvation plus works. It's our work for God and our walk with God. This is the story upon which this Bible Study series Hanging Out With Jesus is built, this story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him, listening to his word, listening to the logos. She was focused on her walk with God. Martha was distracted by all the preparations, all the work for God, and Jesus said Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed and Mary has chosen it and it will not be taken from her. In the priority of things, our work for God is actually the overflow of our walk with God. Those are the three things this parable does not mean. It certainly does not mean we are saved by these works.

Who Are We Supposed To Help?

So who is it that we are supposed to be helping here? Basically, we're supposed to be helping anyone whose need we see that we are in a position to meet. Let me give you a couple of examples. You guys, when Jim Seibert, our former administrator of this Bible Study, was in liver failure a decade ago, many of you men had your blood typed to see if you could be a donor. That's what this text is about! I did it, too! It was a disaster! I had a positive test for AIDS! I was freaking out for three days! How did I get AIDS? Turned out to be a false positive! That's what you get for trying to be a good Christian!

Other examples. Many of you have reached out to Jim Seibert's widow. He died just a few weeks ago, but many of you have reached out to Ginny to offer consolation in her time of mourning. That's what it's about! And what does it say about us if we don't do that? What does it say about us when we don't help a person in need when it's a genuine need and it's clearly within our power to act? That's what Jesus is talking about in this parable.

How Should We Respond?

Finally, how should we respond? Let me give you a couple of thoughts. When I prepare the message, I have this written down in my preparation worksheet. I know a poor message will make the obvious obscure. A good message will make the obscure obvious. A great message will make the obvious obvious. What is it that should be obviously obvious about this text? Here it is: personal involvement. Did you see it? It's just obvious! That what Jesus is calling you here for is personal involvement! It's not enough to write a check to your church and have them distribute your alms to the poor! Personal involvement! Figure out how to get involved, because today you're going to run across many of the least of these! Some of them will look like they're very successful business people, but they are dying on the inside! They're dying on the inside and they need somebody! I have this happen to me all the time. Guys who look so together, and you get to meet them and you ask a few real questions about real life, real meaning, and man do things change when they find out that you're actually interested in listening to them. That's a way you can do this, ask important questions and then listen. Get personally involved.

We had this Big Idea a few weeks ago, **when God puts a man in your path who is stuck, discipleship means finding out why and doing whatever is needed to solve that problem.** Help these people solve whatever problem it is they are facing, and when you think of the least of these, don't think in socio-economic factors alone! Although, that's a good way to do it, but not alone! You have uppers and outers as well as down and outers! Think about them all!

Third, do a gut check on your attitudes as well as your actions towards the least of these! It could be angel!

A guy has been rapping on my door for about six months, looking for work. I gave him some. He wanted to wash my windows. I have a two story house. He's sixty-eight years old. I don't think so. The first time I said how much money do you need. He was looking for twenty dollars. He's taking care of a wife who's been bed ridden for over a decade. Long story, but I could tell he was... if he's not an angel, he should be. I said look, I'm not going to let you climb up on a ladder and wash my windows. Here's the twenty dollars, why don't we just say that was what it was for. He came back with another need. I let him wash the window in back in the family room, and then paid him as though he had washed a couple more. He came back again and then I realized this man needed help. I asked one of our men if he would take him down to the community food outreach and help him with food and lodging and employment. Don't know where all that will end up, but that's what we're talking about here. It's changing the way we look at the least of these so that we will do what Jesus would do.

Then finally, don't hold back. Matthew 28:17, the verse right before the great commission, in *The Message* where Peterson paraphrases says this, some held back not sure about risking themselves totally. Some held back not sure about whether they should risk themselves totally. The Big Idea today says what does it say about us if we do that? If we don't help a person in need, if we don't help when it's in our power to act? Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, we thank you for sending Jesus so that we do have him telling us everything you told him about how this works, this separation of sheep and goats and even more importantly an inspiration for us both positive because of the glory that we will see and negative because of what we want to avoid and help others avoid, too. We do sense, Lord, the gravity of this question, what does it mean when we see a person in need and we don't help them when it was actually in our power to act. Lord, help us to see angels. Help us to do the good works that faith makes possible. We ask this in your name Jesus, amen!