

Text: Matthew 25:34-36 (Pew Bible, pg.984)

Title: “Engage ... With Eternity in Mind”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – A 64-year old swimmer named Diana Nyad made history last week as she became the first person to swim from Cuba and Florida (110 miles). This was her fifth try and she did it in 53 hours. When she finished she was interviewed by the press and she said this: "I wanted this swim, this endeavor not to just be the athletic record. I wanted it to be a lesson for my life that says, be fully engaged." Well, that's one way to “engage.”

But Jesus had something far more meaningful in mind than an athletic achievement when He issued the call to His followers to live on-mission lives ... to engage their world with His love. And if we are alert we will see that God places opportunities along our path every day to show the love of Jesus to others whom He wants to bless. But if we're not careful we will miss those opportunities to engage ... opportunities that have eternal consequences attached to them. Open your Bibles to Matthew 25:31. As you're turning I'll remind you to pick up your copy of “I Am a Church Member.” A2C groups begin meeting tonight, where we'll spend time discussing the book together. Now in this portion of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is answering the question of His disciples about the events that will surround His Second Coming and the end times. Read Matthew 25:31-33.

Now before I get to the points of my message, I want to take a few minutes here to explain the context. Now just notice how Jesus outlines the flow of end time events.

- King Jesus, the Son of Man, will come again in great glory.

Matthew 25:31a - “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him...

When Jesus came the first time 2000 years ago He came in obscurity; His second coming will be in tremendous glory. Two thousand years ago Jesus came as Suffering Savior; when He comes again He will come as the Sovereign Lord.

- King Jesus will take His rightful throne.

Matthew 25:31 - “When the Son of Man comes in his glory ... he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

Jesus came the first time to die on a cross; He's coming the second time to sit on a throne. And from this throne Jesus will judge the nations. Every human being will have to give an account to Jesus. What you do with Jesus determines your eternal destiny.

- All the nations will be gathered before Him.

Matthew 25:32a - All the nations will be gathered before him...

Now nations of the earth will be gathered before Christ, but He will judge them as individuals. This will not be a judgment of groups (America, Germany, Japan, etc.) but of individuals within these groups.

- People from all the nations will be separated according to their relationship with the King.

Matthew 25:32b - He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 25:33 - He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Now in ancient times the shepherd gathered his sheep at night. As the flock entered the enclosure where they are kept the shepherd would tap the sheep to go to the right and the goats to the left. Notice that there is a mingling of

the “sheep” (the righteous believers) and the “goats” (the unrighteous non-believers) through life and history. As you walk through the mall and see people, there is a mingling of the believers and non-believers. As you sit in the stands at a football game, there is a mingling of believers and non-believers. Maybe as we’re sitting here today you wonder, “Am I a sheep or a goat?” Don’t let today pass without getting that settled. Christ may come at any time.

- The “sheep” at Christ’s right hand (the “righteous”) will be ushered into their inheritance of the kingdom of God.

Matthew 25:34 - “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.’”

So Jesus is describing here the eternal destiny of those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ, and who by virtue of that have received the gift of eternal life.

- The “goats” at Christ’s left hand (the “unrighteous”) will be cast out of His presence into eternal suffering.

Matthew 25:41 - “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.’”

These do not inherit a kingdom prepared for them, but one which was prepared for the devil and his angels. But if people listen to Satan and follow his ways, they will end up where he ends up ... in the torment of hell.

- Then Jesus gives the final summary.

Matthew 25:46 - “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

This is final. We’re talking about *eternal* punishment and *eternal* life. There’s no purgatory in here. When you die, your destiny is already set.

But something unusual happens as the righteous are ushered into their eternal life and reward, and as the unrighteous are ushered into their eternal death and punishment. As the righteous are being ushered into the kingdom they have inherited the King will pronounce over them His great pleasure.

Go back to Matthew 25:35-36.

But notice what happens.

Read Matthew 25:37-40.

The righteous are surprised, not that they are entering heaven, but that their deeds were noticed by the Lord. They seem to be surprised that there was somehow a connection between their loving deeds toward hurting people and their Savior Jesus. They were surprised that Jesus was disguised among the hurting and the needy.

Likewise, as the unrighteous march off to the punishment of eternal fire in Hell the King will pronounce over them His great displeasure.

Read Matthew 25:42-43.

They too are surprised.

Matthew 25:44 - “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?’”

Notice that the unrighteous address the King as “Lord;” but He was not truly Lord of their lives. It was merely a hollow profession. In another place Jesus said...

Matthew 7:21 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

And Jesus explains to the surprised “goats” (non-believers)...

Matthew 25:45 - “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Now let me take a few minutes here and show you the eternal side to your life of engaging the people around you with the love of Jesus Christ.

1. THE TRUE REASON FOR THESE DEEDS

When Jesus commended the righteous “sheep” He said:

Matthew 25:34 - “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Notice that they take possession of an “inheritance.” You don’t earn an inheritance. An inheritance is something that someone else has earned and passes along to you. Christ gained eternal life for us when He died and rose again. We receive that inheritance when we place our trust in Him.

Many have read this passage and falsely interpreted it to mean that one may earn salvation and go to heaven simply by serving others. But this is not the meaning of this passage. Nowhere does the Bible teach that a person can be saved by doing good deeds, no matter how sacrificial they may be. The very clear teaching of the New Testament is that we are not saved *by* good works, but we are saved *for* good works.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... not by works, so that no one can boast.

But it goes on to say...

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So the true meaning of these deeds that Jesus acknowledges at the end time judgment is that they are the natural product of the new life of redeemed people.

2. THE ETERNAL CONSEQUENCE TO THESE DEEDS

You see, when a person is saved from that very moment they are assured that they will spend eternity in a wonderful place called heaven. This is the inheritance that Jesus is talking about here. But what we do on our way to heaven, as we live our lives every day on this earth, also has eternal consequences. As the righteous march into heaven Jesus commends them for what they have done for the needy and the hurting. Because they had faith in Christ there was the fruit of good deeds. And as the unrighteous march to their destiny of eternal suffering Jesus condemns them for what they didn’t do for the needy and the hurting. Because they did not have faith, neither did they have the fruit.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - 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.

This isn't about *salvation by good deeds*; it is about *rewards for good deeds*. This is what Jesus was talking about in...

Matthew 10:42 - And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

ILLUSTRATION – Did you hear about the four members of the William Paterson University football team in New Jersey who went into a convenience store one night recently? The store was actually closed, but the lock had malfunctioned and the lights were on, so the players simply thought the store was open. A couple of the players walked through the store and picked up some batteries and some sunglasses to purchase. But when they got to the check-out counter, of course there was no one there. Security cameras caught the entire scene. With no clerk to check them out, and no one watching, the young men called out for someone to help them. When there was no answer they left the exact amount they owed on the counter, and walked out of the store. You can imagine their surprise when the store owner showed up at their campus. He had seen the whole episode on the security camera footage, and he presented the guys each with a \$50 gift cards for their honesty.

Brother and sister, the camera is rolling ... heaven's video is capturing the things we do and the things we don't do. And heaven's camera not only catches what we do, but also why we do it. Again, these deeds are not the basis of our salvation, but they are the basis for our eternal rewards. There are eternal consequences to our deeds of engaging others with the love of Jesus.

3. THE GREAT SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE DEEDS

Now remember what Jesus said...

Matthew 25:40,45 - "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me ... Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

So there is significance in loving others, particularly the needy and the hurting, because when we do we are, in essence, loving Jesus.

Now who are the "least of these brothers of mine"? Some say it refers to any human being in need. Some say it refers specifically to followers of Jesus. Others say it refers to the national brothers of Jesus, the Jews who are saved during the Great Tribulation at the end time. Whoever these brothers of Jesus are, the way we treat them is the way we are treating Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION – Someone passed along this story to me last week that is supposedly true. A pastor named Jeremiah Steepok transformed himself into a homeless person and went to the church that he was to be introduced as the new senior pastor that morning. He walked around what was to be his new church for 30 minutes while it was filling with people for the worship service. Ironically only 3 people out of the thousands attending said hello to him. He asked people for change to buy food. No one in the church gave him a dime. He went into the sanctuary to sit down on the front row and was asked by the ushers if he would please sit in the back. He greeted people but he was met only with stares and dirty looks. So the disguised pastor sat in the back of the church and listened until the time came for the church leaders to introduce the new pastor to the congregation. They were excited: "We would like to introduce to you Pastor Jeremiah Steepok." The congregation began applauding and looking around. Then the pastor disguised as a homeless man stood up and started walking down the aisle. The clapping stopped with all eyes on him. He walked up to the pulpit and took the microphone from the church leader (who was in on this) and paused for a moment, then he recited the words of our text this morning. (Read vv.35-40).

Then the pastor looked towards the congregation and told them all what he had experienced that morning ... how as a homeless man he had been treated. Obviously many were embarrassed at the way they had treated the "stranger." Then the new pastor said, "Today I see a gathering of people, not a church of Jesus Christ. The world has enough people, but not enough disciples. When will you decide to become disciples?" He then dismissed service until next week.

Jesus is disguised among His needy and hurting people. To love them is to love Jesus.

Galatians 6:9-10 - Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

So as believers we should be concerned about doing good for all people as we have the opportunity. All means all. But we should feel a particular urgency about caring for the hurting and needy among the family of believers.

4. THE AMAZING SIMPLICITY OF THESE DEEDS

These are all things that anyone can do. They are just practical, everyday needs that existed among those who followed Jesus faithfully, but also among others. This is a case of simple help to people we encounter every day.

Every situation he mentions presents us with a literal opportunity with eternal consequences.

Matthew 25:35 - 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,

Matthew 25:36 - 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.'

Now these needs were very real in Jesus' day. And they will be real right up to the time Jesus comes again. There's a solidarity between Jesus and those on the margins of life ... the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, people who need clothing, the sick and the incarcerated.

CONCLUSION

I want you to think back over last week. Did you miss opportunities to serve other people? Did you shrug off a co-worker's need to confide in you? Did you ignore openings to make your spouse's life a little easier? Did you take every opportunity you should have to encourage your children? Did you take advantage of the opening you had to speak to a person about Jesus and the Gospel? Maybe at the time you didn't even realize you were missing out on blessing others, but now, looking back on your week, you see chances that slipped through your fingers. You can change that this week.