



## **WHAT MATTERS MOST TO JESUS (Sermon)**

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### **Purpose of the Sermon**

To show how caring for the needy is more important to Jesus than anything else.

Key Text: Matthew 25:31-46 (NKJV)

Open by reading key text.

### **What Matters Most to You?**

A pastor remembers a time during his teenage years when an older brother returned home with so much excitement. He was coming from a division-wide Pathfinder camporee. He brought with him something that looked like a gold medal. It was his reward for winning a marathon. This medal was his joy. It mattered so much to him. For him it was a great achievement. However, his dad surprised him. He did not feel excited about the medal. He asked if the medal could buy food or be used in anyway in the house. Dad thought that this medal was only going to occupy space in the house for no good reason. Receiving a medal did not matter so much to dad like it did to the pastor's brother.

What matters most to you? What would you consider as your greatest achievement, something that tops the list in your resume, something that you might even be remembered for?

How about in your Christian life? What are the things that make you proud, things that you feel you have done so well, things that you feel may even make you acceptable to Jesus? Maybe you have read your Bible from Genesis to Revelation many times. Maybe you have overcome many temptations. Maybe you have conducted outreach programs. Maybe you are a vegetarian. These things may make us feel that we are on the right track in our Christian walk with Jesus.

I took time to evaluate myself for the past year and I realized that I have preached so many sermons. This made me feel fulfilled. I felt like Yes, I have done my best for Jesus. But as I read Matthew 25:31-46, I realized something that I had not realized before. Jesus will not ask me how many sermons I have preached. I was struck by the fact that what may seem important to me, what may seem like my greatest achievement, even in my spiritual journey, may be so far from being what matters most to Jesus.

It is very important for us to know what matters most to Jesus and do it because someday, each one of us is going to stand before the judgement seat of Jesus to give an account for how we have spent the gift of life that He gave us.

The greatest tragedy of life is to reach the end zone of our lives and realize that despite the many things we have accomplished, we have missed the mark, we have failed to do what God wanted us to do. In the Bible, we read about great men like Saul who seemed to have accomplished a lot, yet not the things that God wanted him to accomplish. Judas may have accomplished a great deal in his life but in the end, he missed God's will and purpose for his life and ended up losing it all. Solomon, however, at the end of his life, realized that living for God and God's people was far better than just enjoying the throne as a king. Solomon decided in the last moments of his life to focus on what he believed mattered most to God. He put aside his kingly crown and robe and became a preacher. Therefore, it is very important that we are careful to focus on things that matter most to Jesus.

### **Background of Matthew 25:31-46**

In our passage, Jesus reveals to us what matters most to Him. He reveals to us what He expects us—His followers—to be doing as we wait for His return.

Matthew 25:31-46 is part of the sermon of Jesus to His disciples on Mount Olivet. The disciples had learned from Jesus that the temple of Jerusalem would someday be destroyed (Matt 24:1-2). They thought that if such a great temple would be destroyed, then it had to do with the end of the world and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. The disciples were so interested in knowing when all these things would take place. They wanted to be ready for that time.

The whole of Matthew 24 and 25 is Christ's answer to the question of the disciples: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" So, in Matthew 24, Christ focuses on the signs of the times. The key

message there is a call to watch and pray since no one knows exactly when Jesus will return. There is nothing so important for a Christian like being ready for Christ's second coming. People also need to be aware that the second coming of Jesus is not the only thing that will be sudden. Our death may—more often than not—happen suddenly. Therefore, it is very important that we are always ready to meet Jesus. In Matthew 25, Jesus gives a warning message about the consequences of not being prepared when He comes the second time. In the last portion of the same chapter, Christ takes the minds of His disciples to the very time of His second coming. He wanted them to be aware so that they would prepare for it. It is a message for all of us today.

### **Jesus Is Coming Back as King of Kings**

In Matthew 25:31, Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man.” However, in verse 34, He refers to Himself as the “King.” Jesus, who once came to this earth as a little baby, so poor that he was born in a manger, will someday return as king to rule forever. Jesus, who once came and was not recognized that even His own relatives rejected and wanted to kill Him, will come back in great power and glory. Though during His first coming it seemed like nothing much was happening, when He comes the second time, all the world will know. “Every eye will see Him,” as He returns in majesty and glory with the host of angels. He will be coming not as the Savior of the world but as Judge, not anymore to be tortured and scorned by men but to put an end to sin and sinners. This must have excited the disciples, knowing that they would be part of that great kingdom where their Lord would reign forever.

### **Illustration**

As a child growing up in Uganda, a pastor saw some poor and struggling people make their way to the USA to work. After many years, as these people came back home to Uganda, they would be admired and adored because they would be so rich. The irony is that those who used to be indifferent to them or even mocked them would now befriend them and act as if they are very close. They suddenly gained so many friends. But those who were friends with these people, even when they were still poor and before they left to work abroad, rejoiced because once their friends returned from abroad, they would share their money and other good stuff with them.

In the same way when Jesus comes back, He will reward His friends and punish His enemies. Jesus will be coming to set up a kingdom here on earth where the righteous will dwell in peace and harmony throughout eternity.

Usually, the first thing the king or any political leader does when he or she comes to power is to remove his or her enemies from offices first. So, Jesus will put an end to all the kingdoms of this world once and for all. And then He will separate those who will be part of His new kingdom.

### **Are You a Sheep or Goat?**

In our passage, we are told that Jesus will separate people between two groups. Jesus uses two analogies to represent these two groups. On the left will be the goats and, on the right, will be the sheep. The sheep are all those who surrendered their lives to Jesus and followed Him all the way. The goats are all those who lived for themselves and wanted Jesus to follow them. Then Jesus will pronounce judgement upon both groups: the goats to eternal punishment and the sheep to eternal life.

There are two shocking things that we need to consider. First, both the sheep and the goats are surprised to be on the side on which they find themselves. The people on the right side are amazed by the fact that they are chosen to be there. Someone said that heaven will be a place full of surprises. The first surprise will be that you are there. In other words, the righteous won't feel that they deserved to be saved. They won't feel that they have done anything that qualifies them to receive the gift of eternal life. It is because of this that the saved will forever be grateful of God's amazing grace through Jesus. In the same way, those on the left side will also wonder why they are there. They feel that they have done good things to earn eternal life. They have a list of the things they have done in the name of Jesus. As a faithful Judge, Jesus will give the reason for His judgment.

### **Shocking Revelation**

Jesus now turns to those on the right side to let them know why they are chosen for eternal life. He says, "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; <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" (Matthew 25:35-36).

What is shocking in Christ's words to the righteous is that He does not give a list of the things that they did that seem to matter much to us as human beings. Jesus does not even

talk about spiritual disciplines. He does not say, you are chosen because you kept the faith, because you fasted every week, because you prayed a lot and read your Bible regularly. He does not mention things that for us are crucial requirements to receiving eternal life and being part of God's kingdom. Instead, Jesus talks about things that we may have taken for granted, things that we even neglect. We see that the righteous are not even aware of these things. But Christ remembers the seemingly small and unimportant things. It is because these are the things that matter most to Him: giving a glass of water to the thirsty, giving some food to a neighbor who has not eaten in a while, visiting someone sick, visiting someone in prison, saying a word of encouragement to someone discouraged, doing whatever you can to relieve the poor and suffering, living for others. All these can be summed up in one word, compassion. Jesus says, "You are my sheep indeed because you did the things which mattered most to me."

We need to take note that Jesus is not teaching salvation by works here. He is not saying that doing these things secures one a place in heaven. Jesus begins His words to the righteous by saying, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

In other words, the righteous—those on the right side, the sheep—are there because they are "blessed." The Bible says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." These people have had an encounter with Jesus. They have experienced the mercy of Jesus. They are saved by grace through Jesus. And because of their experience of salvation, they became instruments and ambassadors of Jesus. They became Christ's hands, and feet, and voice, and arms. Christ lives in their lives so that they live to care for others. They are filled with the compassion of Jesus. They have died to the selfishness and pride of this world.

The righteous—the sheep, those on the right side of Jesus—did not just talk about Jesus, but they became a manifestation of Christ's love and compassion to the world. They lived Christ-centered lives. Christ, in this section, was talking about the fruits of salvation. The righteous surrendered their lives to Jesus. As a result, Jesus worked through their lives and gave them power to do the things that mattered most to Him. No one ever cared like Jesus. He spent His whole life caring for the needs of others. Wherever there was human suffering, Jesus was always there. Jesus was filled with compassion for the poor and the

suffering, for the sick and the imprisoned, both physically and spiritually. He provided food for the hungry and hope for the hopeless. He brought a smile to the faces of those whom society considered as outcasts. Jesus was always there to relieve any kind of human suffering. He did all this because it is what matters most to Him.

Take note that the righteous are so humble that they do not even know that they are doing all these things. It is because they are doing so not to be saved but because they are already saved. It is because they are constrained by the love of Jesus that they can't help but do these things. The love they receive from Jesus spills to others naturally. They don't know they have done all these good things because they believe it is Jesus doing these things through them, not they themselves doing these things out of their own will and strength.

### **They never take the credit.**

The people represented by the goats live selfish lives. They care about nothing but themselves. They live this way because they are not "blessed." They have never had an encounter with Jesus. They have never surrendered their lives to Jesus. So, they have no power to live for and like Jesus, because they have never desired to have a relationship with Jesus. These people may do many good things. But they do them only for selfish motives. Everything they do is always an investment for some big return in the future. That's why Jesus tells them that He never knows them.

### **There is Still an Opportunity**

In the ancient times, both sheep and goats were grazed together. When they mixed, it was hard to distinguish one from the other. However, at the end of the day, the shepherd would separate his sheep from the goats. His sheep knew his voice and the shepherd also knew them. So, they would easily follow their master.

Today, the question that each of us must answer—and we must not rest until each one of us has answered—is "Am I a sheep or a goat?" As you look at your life, can you truly say that you are living for Jesus? Have you truly surrendered your life to Jesus? Is Jesus working through you to extend His mercy, love, and compassion to the world? Are you sure that if He comes today, He can say to you, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world?"

Today, we all live together. We enjoy the same things every day. We go to the same church every week and fellowship together. We experience similar services in church. We

even work together in many ways. It seems that we are all the same as we all look like we are the same people, and there is no difference. But the fact is that among us are sheep and goats. As the shepherd leaves the sheep and the goat to graze together through the day, so we all mingle together awaiting that day, the final judgement day, when Christ shall come to separate His sheep from the goats.

### **Final appeal**

In the book of Revelation, we learn that we are right now living in the hour of judgement. Christ is determining who His sheep are and who the goats are. Time is running out very quickly. But the best news is that you can choose which side you will be on today. “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” Christ longs for each one of us to be on His right hand as His sheep when He comes to judge the whole world. That’s why He gave us this message through Matthew, so that on that day we won’t be caught by surprise. What a loving Savior!

So, in our passage, Christ talks about the root of salvation, which is allowing Him to save us by surrendering our lives completely to Him. And then He talks about the fruit of salvation, meaning the life we live because of the salvation we experience by faith in Jesus. He lives in us. And then through us He pours out His love, care, and compassion to the suffering world. We become God’s instruments in relieving the needs of the people around us.

### **My Experience**

Last Christmas a pastor was preaching in a certain church. Suddenly a young boy entered the door of the church. He was a beggar. The response was to quickly send this little beggar away because they were busy worshipping. Later, it struck the pastor. He thought, What kind of God are we worshipping if we are not sensitive to the needs of those around us? I am sure Jesus would not have treated this little beggar like that church did. Jesus identified Himself with the needy. He said, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

If you want to meet Jesus today and walk in His footsteps, you don’t have to make a trip to Jerusalem. All you must do is to go wherever the needy and the suffering are. He is there in the orphanages. He is there on the streets with the hungry and the homeless. He is there in the refugee camps. He is there in the hospitals. He is there in the evacuation centers

for those displaced because of calamities. He is there among the hopeless and the discouraged. That's where Jesus is. That's who Jesus is. And that's what He longs to be in us and through us. So that someday when He comes, we can all hear Him sweetly say to us, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."