

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

SIX-WEEK QUEST

SERMON OUTLINE 2

FINDING THE HOLE IN ME

MATTHEW 25:31-46

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

A little over two hundred years ago, Thomas Jefferson took a pair of scissors to the four gospels and cut out all the verses that contained angels, prophecy, references to Jesus' divinity and all the miracles, including the virgin birth and the Resurrection—then he pasted together what was left. It became known and published as "The Jefferson Bible."

His "Bible" ends with these words: "Now, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed." – No resurrection. No eternal life. No hope.

Jefferson cut those verses out because he didn't believe in them. We may not be so brazen to cut out parts of the Bible, but we may be accomplishing the same thing by ignoring some Scriptures or not taking them seriously.

INTENSIFY THE ISSUE

In the book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, the author tells about a friend of his who cut out all the verses that were about poverty, wealth, justice, and oppression. He didn't do this because he didn't believe in those verses. Rather, he did this to make a dramatic point that for many Christians in America, we wouldn't miss those verses at all. It was the American Bible,

and it had a gaping hole in it.

To help correct this problem, the Bible Society recently published a Bible that highlights more than 2,000 verses that spell out God's attitude to poverty and justice. Highlighting these passages helps us easily see what we have been overlooking.

It was pastor and writer Rick Warren who laid the foundations for this Bible. It came out of his personal discovery that there were 2,000 verses on poverty - that he hadn't paid much attention to before.

Pastor: If you can, describe your own journey of not really noticing these verses and then becoming more aware of them.

Today we are going to look at one of those passages. You probably are familiar with this one. But if you were honest, you might wish it was cut out because it may hit a little too close to home. As Mark Twain said, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me; it's the parts I do understand!"

INSTRUCT WITH THE BIBLE

CONTEXT: Jesus, at the end of his ministry, started teaching extensively about those events that will bring to an end the world as we know it. He warned us of signs that would tell us that the unpredictable end was near. He warned us to be ready for that day, with

the parable of the 10 virgins, and the parable of the talents. But then he shifts from telling parables. In our passage today - Matthew 25:31-46 - some refer to it as "the parable of the sheep and the goats." But it really is not a parable. Instead, it is a sketch of the judgment which comes with Christ's return. The sheep and the goats are metaphors for the righteous and the wicked. But the rest seems to be a true description rather than a parable.

Read Matthew 25:31-46

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

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.

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.

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.'

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, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did

for me.'

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.

42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, 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, 'I tell you the truth, 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."

The big picture here is clear to see: This is a glimpse of the final judgment (see Daniel 7:13—14) at the end of history, when Jesus judges humankind. Everyone will be gathered and divided into one of two groups.

Even though the big picture is clear, there are two very surprising elements to see in this passage. Let's start with the first one.

1. WE ARE JUDGED BY OUR WALK, NOT OUR TALK

Jesus, the King, invites the righteous into His Kingdom based on what they did: 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.'

Then the King sent out the cursed into hell based on what they did NOT do: 42For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I 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.'

Every judgment scene in the New Testament, including this one, is made on the basis of deeds.

- 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done (Mt 16:27).
- 28 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice
29 and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (Jn 5:28-29).
- 6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done."
7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.
8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (Rom 2:6-8).
- 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 (2 Cor 5:10).
- 17 Since you call on a Father who

judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear (1 Pet 1:17).

- 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.
12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.
13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.
14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.
15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15).

But this does not mean that we are saved by doing good works. Salvation is "by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8), and "not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5).

So how can we be saved by grace, but judged by works?

It is as simple as this: At the final judgment, the only thing that will really matter is our relationship with Jesus. And our relationship is based on our walk with Him not our talk about Him. How we live our lives reveals what we really believe about Jesus.

The “good works” has less to do with ethical actions than with living a life of mercy. Sheep acted in tangible and loving ways toward the poor, sick, imprisoned, and the vulnerable, while the goats did not. The goats are punished not for the evil they did, but for the good they didn’t do. Their behavior betrays their lack of care for Jesus.

Genuine faith will have evidence of a transformed life. The roots of faith planted in the soil of Christ will have fruits of compassion to the poor.

The evidences for true faith were acts of love for others that Christ viewed as acts of love for Him. Will Christ find evidence of our genuine concern for His “least” when he looks at the fruit of our lives on that day? This leads us to the second surprising element in this passage.

2. WHAT WE DO TO “THE LEAST,” WE DO TO JESUS

Let’s look again at our passage, starting at 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, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

The sheep are surprised to hear that they had ministered to the King in times of distress.

Why?

Because they didn’t recognize him. They didn’t

realize that when they helped the least, Jesus took it personally.

By contrast, the goats are surprised to discover they had overlooked the King.

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, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Jesus takes it personally when we do or do not serve His least – just like we take it personally when people treat well or mistreat our own children.

Pastor: You may want to give a personal example of how it affected you when someone helped or ignored your child.

So, who are the least? Jesus describes them in six ways. They are:

- **The hungry** – maybe they have lost their job and don’t have any income or savings. Maybe they have experienced a famine. Maybe they are so poor that they can’t even afford food. There are millions of people who live on what is called “0. 0. 1.” Zero for breakfast, zero for lunch, rice and beans for dinner. They need food.
- **The thirsty** – There are people, even children, whose job it is to find water. They walk for miles. They carry it back. And it is water that is more contaminated than what is in our toilets. They need wells and clean water.
- **The stranger** – there are people who are outsiders. Maybe they are unpopular, or a bit strange. Maybe they are different from

us. A different race. A different belief. A different economic level. A different intellectual ability. They need a place to be invited in and belong.

- **Those without clothing** – there are millions without shoes. There are millions who only have one shirt – one that we wouldn't use as a rag. Ironically, many of them make our clothes that fill our closets. They need to be clothed.
- **The sick** – there are millions who are dying of treatable and even preventable diseases like AIDS, Dysentery, or Malaria. There are millions dying in pain. They need care, compassionate touch, and medicine.
- **The imprisoned** – there are many who are locked away from society and the church. Many deserve to be there. Some are there because they opposed a malevolent power. Either way, they need someone with the light to shine in their dark world.

These are all examples of the least. They are people who live on the edge of survival. They are people who go unnoticed. They are powerless. They don't have status. They can't do anything for us. They are outsiders.

Here is the ironic thing. We come to this building to find and serve God. But Jesus tells us that God is outside. To move outwards is to move towards God. God is always with the outsiders – the least.

IMAGINE THE RESULT

Imagine your own life like a puzzle. If you don't have, in some way, "the least" in your

life, then you are missing some pieces. If you are cutting the least out of your life, then there is a hole in you – a hole in your gospel. There is no "whole gospel" without compassion and justice shown to the least

Is there a hole in you? There may be if you are afraid to see some people and enter into their world to help heal their pain.

Who in your life today are "the least"? How are you reaching out to them? And how are they patching up the hole in your life – in your gospel?

Pastor: Share an example of someone in your church who is reaching out to the least.

ILLUSTRATE THE APPLICATION

I'd like you to do a simple thing. Think by name of someone who is least in your life. Do you have it? Now commit to reach out to them this week in a tangible act of compassion, care, and love.

If you couldn't think of someone, then you need to patch that hole in your life. Pray that God will give you the eyes to see someone this week that He wants you to help. Then, cast aside any judgment, and help them.

Pastor: Share what you will do – invite people to follow your own example.

