

Part 44: What's Going On? Part 3

Tyler Velin | Matthew 25:14-46

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Before we get started today I want you to think about three questions very seriously. I'm going to give some space for you to consider them because I want you to really give them some thought.

The first question is: "How do you know you are, or are not, a Christian?" The second question is: "How do you think your life will be assessed?" To put it another way, "What is the measure of a life well lived?" And lastly, "How do those two answers shape your life?"

The French Philosopher Albert Camus said it this way, "I don't wait for the last judgment. It comes every day." I would imagine that for many of us we live our lives under the burden of a pending judgment. We spend our lives waiting to hear back on exams. Wondering what our love interest might think of us. Wanting to know how our boss assess our work. Hoping that our kids will think of us as capable parents. And based off what you imagine these assessment processes look like, they inevitably have an affect not only on your emotional state, but also on the way you live.

Today Jesus is going to tell us how each and every one of us are going to be assessed. And what we know about this assessment process, or more importantly, what you actually believe about this assessment process will be the single biggest contributor to the meaning your life will have.

If you are a Christian, I imagine that at some level you want to live a life which glorifies God. If we want to do that well we must hear what Jesus is going to say in this text. If you are a non-Christian, you might just want to find belonging or contentment in this world. And if that is you, then this text is also for you.

The past few weeks we have been looking at a portion of Matthew called the Olivet Discourse where Jesus is speaking a lot about what will come and the end of this world. Today as he speaks about the final judgment we are going to see four things. We are going to see **two "How's."** That is, how should we live in light of the final assessment we will receive? And secondly we are going to see **two "Why's."** Why we should live like this in light of the coming judgment.

What we are looking at today is really two sections of Jesus' teaching which seem to be really similar in a lot of ways, yet each is distinct in its own ways. One of these distinctions is that the first parable deals perhaps in specific with those who claim to follow Jesus, but the second story deals with the unmistakable totality of humanity. Which means that regardless of where you are with Jesus today, or how you view the idea of heaven and hell, this passage has something for you to consider.

If you have your Bibles, today we are going to be in Matthew 25:14-46, and if you were listening very carefully to the text when it was just read for you, you heard lots of contrasts in that text. There was good work, and no work, blessing and curses, joy and darkness, responsibility and reclamation, eternal life and eternal punishment.

Which means it's not going to be hard to discern from these two stories which responses to Jesus are good responses and which responses are poor responses. So as we look at how we live in light of Jesus' second coming we are going to focus on the right ways to live in each of these stories.

With that said let's look at our first passage of scripture today: **Matthew 25:14-30**.

Here we have the first "How." How should we live as we wait for Jesus? **We labor for Jesus' kingdom in all of our life.**

That's the pretty clear line of division here right? There were three servants each given a portion of their master's property. Two went and put that money to work right away, and made more money. One went and hid it in the ground and did nothing with it.

As the master came back to settle accounts with his servants, he was pleased to find that the first two had increased the value of their talents, and he was upset with the third for doing nothing with his.

Now if you've been around the church for a while you've probably heard this passage used to emphasize how Jesus has given people different talents, different skills with which to glorify God. I think that is a great implication of this text. And it is true that God has given his Holy Spirit to the church in different ways to empower different people for different tasks.

But I'm not fully convinced that the talents in this text are skills in the same sense we often make of them. Why? Well I think if we look at how Jesus has spoken of treasures so far in this gospel we might have a greater idea of what he's getting at: **Matthew 13:44-46, 52b**.

Almost anytime Matthew discusses treasure or value being possessed by someone, it is synonymous with the Kingdom of heaven. So what did Jesus give to these men? The value and beauty of the kingdom of heaven. This has been the primary theme of this book has it not: seek the kingdom, desire the kingdom, pray for the kingdom, inherit the kingdom. And remember back in Matthew 16, Jesus gives to his disciples the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

That means that when we consider what it is that Jesus has given us we ought to consider the skills and talents that we have and we should consider how we are using those to magnify the glory of God. But more importantly Jesus is stressing here not the utility, but the worth of the gift.

If you are one who has received the good news of the gospel of the kingdom, you have been given the value of the kingdom. God gives mighty gifts to his church, wonderful gifts, gifts that must be present for the church to do what God has called us to do, but the greatest value Jesus has given to the church is the influence of the kingdom of God, an awareness of the beauty of your salvation.

What does that mean? I'm not a big superhero movie guy. But I did watch Black Panther last year. And in the film there is this innate tension between the people of Wakanda, a hidden city, and the rest of the world. In Wakanda there is a powerful and precious metal which causes the people of there to thrive. It helps them keep the peace, it solves their medical needs, it cares for the poor, it protects them, and it's a sort of utopia.

The dilemma in the movie is how much of this powerful and rare resource do they keep to themselves, verses use it to help problems in the outside world. But at the end of the movie the King of Wakanda says this, "Wakanda will no longer watch from the shadows. We cannot. We must not. We will work to be an example of how we as brothers and sisters on this Earth should treat each other."

Do you realize that in the gospel, Jesus our master has given us all his property? Whatever was at the disposal of Jesus, he has given to us. His prayer in the gospel of John is that we might have the same relationship with the Father as Jesus himself has. In our salvation Jesus has not withheld any of his loving goodness. The fullness of salvation, the promise of true life, the assurance of ultimate belonging and salvation, we have that.

And if we, like the first two men, see the value of this gift given, then wouldn't we want to multiply its influence? Wouldn't we want to spread the value of this kingdom so that we might experience it more, but also that those around us can experience it more?

A true servant of this king sees the wonderful news of sins forgiven and life provided, and they immediately begin to put it to work in their life. It is the natural response when given such an object of value. And to labor for that is to receive the warm welcome of your master when he returns.

So my question for you is: where are you investing with the gospel in your life? For some of us, we may be to the point where the gospel is multiplying at vast levels. For others it might small increments of interest. But the point of this parable is that the effects of the gospel will grow in you because it has immense value. Where is the salvation that Jesus has given you growing? How is it changing you? How are others experiencing it in your own life?

If we are all honest we have moments in our lives where we can feel like the third servant right? We can feel that Jesus is harsh towards us, that his commands to grow in holiness, to live a life that pleases him, to invest in eternity are really thieves of joy. But did you notice the blessing that Jesus gave the other two servants? **Matt. 25:21.**

Part of the blessing for the faithful servant is more responsibility. Which means even here in the context of the final judgment, the responsibility and ability to glorify God by making much of his kingdom is a joy to be experienced and not a job to be executed. It is a joy to live your life for the glory of God. In heaven it will be our privilege not to stop this task but to be able to do it finally and fully without complication.

Christians who will stand before their master well on judgement day are Christians who spend their lives laboring for God's kingdom wherever they are.

This is the point of the first parable Jesus uses. The second portion of scripture isn't a parable, instead it's a partial portrait of what we can expect when Jesus comes back. We know it's not a parable because look how it starts: **Matthew 25:31-33.**

He's not separating sheep and goats, he separating people like a shepherd separates sheep and goats. And more than that, the scope in this picture is far greater. All the nations will be gathered before this glorious Jesus as he sits on his glorious throne. This picture of separation and assessment may sound like a nursery rhyme with a dark twist, but this is the real reality for each and every person who has ever lived.

You will have to stand before Jesus one day whether you believe in him or not. That's the prerogative you get to take when you are the sovereign ruler and not Santa Clause. If people don't believe in Santa Clause he loses his power and he is impacted by it. When people don't believe in Jesus as the Son of Man it is not to his detriment it is to their own.

And let's take a look at this picture of judgment before we look at our second way of living in light of this final assessment: **Matthew 25:31-46**.

The second "how" in light of this final assessment is this: **We love others as Jesus**.

In this picture into what will one day be, Jesus welcomes some into his kingdom, and sends others into eternal punishment. And the evidence he gives for each is the way they treated those whom Jesus calls, "the least of these."

Now remember what Jesus said back in **Matthew 22:37-39**. Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with the whole of your life and to love your neighbor as yourself. We have just seen two pictures into the final day of judgement and when we put them together one emphasis devotion to the glory of God and one service to your brother. Do you think perhaps Jesus was serious about both of those?

And specifically here Jesus is speaking about the ways in which we serve, or minister to (vs. 44) our brothers and sisters in Christ. There are many places in the Bible where general calls to philanthropy and service are given. And we don't want to de-emphasize those texts, but this text in specific deals with the way in which those who are righteous treat their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's what Jesus means when he says, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." This isn't a new designation for believers. Look back at **Matthew 12:48-50**, **Matthew 18:6**.

When Jesus is saying this he is not saying that our actions towards those who are not part of the church are unimportant. He is not saying that we only care for those who are in the church. But he is making a distinction here that the apostle Paul builds on in **Galatians 6:10**. And it would make sense that Jesus says service towards them is service towards him because the church is the body of Christ is it not? To care for the body even in metaphor is to care for Christ in a literal sense.

One of my favorite parts about having guest speakers at our church is hearing the guest preacher bring greetings from whatever church he is at. It may sound silly and cheesy but it really makes me want to cry whenever I hear it. It's one of my favorite things to do when I have the opportunity to preach other places.

But this is what God's church was meant to do, care for each other, locally, regionally, and internationally. If we remember what Jesus has been saying over the past few weeks, we have seen that there is going to be many dark days for the church ahead. The gospel will collect its interest but it might be in an economy of martyrs.

But for those who are true servants and true sheep, the gospel shifts the epicenter of our hearts towards God and towards others. Why? Because the generous service we received in Christ dying for us compels us to die for others. Brothers and sisters in our western comfort and luxury, where might God be calling you to care for churches that are less fortunate than our own around the globe. If you go to the Fellowship Area after service you will see two maps. The first map has pictures of missionaries we support around the globe, consider supporting them financially. The second map is of the current places and levels of persecution our brothers and sisters are experiencing around the world. Will you pray for them?

This is what God has called us to do, but it isn't just those around the globe we care for, it is those who are with us. In this city, in this building, in your own home. How are you coming alongside your brothers and sisters and serving them in their weaknesses. When was the last time you encouraged someone with the hope of God? When did you clothe someone in the affirmation of the gospel? When have you opened your home to other believers to experience your hospitality? What does your wallet say about your worship?

The ways in which we labor for the kingdom and love others are essential components of what your life will mean when it comes down to judgement day. However does this mean that we are saved by our works? Are we saved only if we do the work of gospel investment and loving others?

No. How do we know that? Because the talents that the servants were given were not given because they earned it. It was given according to their ability, but not because of their worth. So when they worked, they didn't work from their own wealth but instead from the wealth of their master. And second, the righteous in the text we just read, were shocked when Jesus said they did all these things.

They replied, "When did we do these things?" Which means they didn't expect these works to be done as a way to earn their salvation. If they did, then they wouldn't have been surprised. Because the truth is at the end of both of these passages we don't have those who work hard and those who don't, those who love and those who don't. What do we have? Look back at verse 46. We have those who are righteous and those who are not.

We are made righteous not by our works, for Jesus himself said that about the Pharisees, we are made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus' point is, if you have my righteousness, you will do these things. To have that value, to so see the way in which I served you, is to let that shape the whole of your life.

And this is very important. Because in this text are not only the "How to's" of the Christian life, but also the "Why's." Because Jesus is God, it would have been just as right for him to tell us how to live without any sort of added motivation. But because God is a good God, he has chosen to empower our hearts with joyful motivations in this age of waiting.

Why would we want to be righteous and live that out by glorifying God and loving others? Two reasons. The first is that **We avoid eternal punishment.**

Both the third servant and the people on the left end up facing the full wrath of God in eternal punishment. A survey done back in 2003 showed that 64% of Americans think they will go to heaven when they die, and only 1% think they will go to hell. This is often because it is easy for us to look out into the world and see what others have done, and think, I'm not as bad as they are.

But did you notice that Jesus doesn't call these two groups of people cursed and wicked because of what they did. He calls them cursed and wicked because of what they did not do. They did not bear fruit, they did not care for the least of these. In fact throughout the book of Matthew it is the sins of omission, not the sins of commission that Jesus has been most concerned with.

You did not serve them, you did not bear fruit, you did not keep your lamp, you do not know me, you do not honor me, you do not obey the scriptures, you do not love the Lord. The most scandalous sins are

not harm done towards others, but instead worship unoffered to God. All sin, all wicked action finds its start here. And because of that, God will act justly. God will condemn those who have done evil actions and not done right actions.

And I would argue that it's only when we see this doctrine of punishment that the love of God and the work of Jesus becomes all the more beautiful. Because if you are awarded the righteousness of Christ through faith, every just ounce of judgment meant for you was taken by Christ in your stead. In the doctrine of eternal punishment we not only see the promise of justice fully met, but we also see the costly assurance of Jesus' love for his people.

We will be punished not only for what we did do that was evil, but also what we could not do because our hearts were not good. But this again is why God's people must look at these two parables and take heart in what Jesus has done. Because not only has he died for the wicked we have committed, but he has given us new hearts empowered by the Holy Spirit to do for the first time what we were unable to do: worship him and serve others as an extension of Jesus.

This brings us to the second why of this text. Why should we live these ways: **We receive the joy we were made for.**

Now I want us to look very carefully at three verses from this passage all together and we are going to build out the immense motivation that there is for us in those text: **Matthew 25:21, 28-29, 34.**

The prize of believing the gospel message that Jesus died for your sins, and recognizing the value that gift is, and letting your life mirror the values of that gift is other worldly joy, unmerited riches, and intricately prepared fellowship with God.

Other worldly joy. The reward of life lived in light of the gospel is the very joy of Jesus himself. Just this week I met with my brother who is my financial advisor and he was going over with me what my retirement funds were doing, and they were doing pretty well. He acted excited, but you know who was more excited: me. It was my money.

The master will always have greater joy over the expansion of his wealth than the steward, but in the gospel Jesus invites us to share in his joy. There are endless things in this world that offer you satisfaction in their product, but here Jesus offers satisfaction in himself. Brothers and sisters, we will have great joy in this world as we encounter the richness of the gospel here, but there is a greater joy yet to come.

What awaits us is not only other worldly joy, but unmerited riches. Look back at **Matthew 25:28-29**. So here we have the first servant who was loaned five talents. He made five talents more, and then back in verse 20 he gave them back to Jesus. But did you see what happened in this text. Jesus isn't the one with the talents. The servant again has the talents, and he doesn't have the five that he started with, he has the ten that it grew into. He got to keep them.

The gospel investments we make in this world matter in eternity, and more importantly they will be unmerited sources of rich joy for you in all eternity. This master is just, but he is not harsh. He does not extract praise for his own arrogance, he extracts praise because he is worth it, and then he shares it abundantly with those who worship him.

And then lastly we receive the eternal joy of intricately prepared fellowship with God. The third servant was declared worthless and cast out, the goats were sent to a punishment prepared for the devil and his angels. But those who saw and served under the banner of the gospel were awarded not only with "Well done good and faithful servant" but the beautiful promise of this: "Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Brothers and sisters, sinners and saints, this is what we were made for. There is joy, love and ever present salvation made, planned, prepared, and waiting for us in eternity. Will that joy, that blessing, that experience be yours?

In this Olivet Discourse, Jesus has made it clear that we will be surprised by his second coming, but he does not want us to be surprised at our eternal condition at his second coming. He wants us to know our hope. Our hope is that Christ has died for our sins and provide us his righteousness so that we might live life for him.

Why are you a Christian? What is the mark of a life well lived? And how do these answers shape your life?

1 John 2:28-29.