

Matthew 25:31-46

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[0:00] The interesting thing, somebody somewhere, he's having a, I don't know, am I kicking something?

! Alright, cool. Here's the interesting thing about a diagnosis for mono, and I promise this is going somewhere.

! The blood test for mono does not look for mono. Certainly the doctor wants to know whether you have mono, but the blood tests that diagnose many viral infections do not actually look for the virus that's in question.

What do they look for? They test to see which antibodies your immune system is producing to fight off infection. So if you have mononucleosis antibodies, it's because you have mono.

If you have hepatitis antibodies, it's because you have hepatitis, so on and so forth. The antibodies themselves are not the disease, but they are a response to it. They are the signs of it.

[1:11] That means that they're an accurate indication that you have the disease. Now, what does that have to do with Matthew chapter 25?

In chapters 24 and 25, which is known as the Olivet Discourse because he's on the Mount of Olives, Jesus is talking about the last things. For most of chapter 24, Jesus has been preparing his disciples for what this age of the world, right, between his cross and his second coming, what that would be like.

And he called that the age of the birth pains. And then when we got to chapter 24, verse 36, Jesus shifted and looked forward to that day, the day of his second coming.

And what two things has he been concerned about in chapter 25 that we know about that day?

First, that no one knows that day or hour.

It will come at a time we don't expect. And second, because of that, he says, be ready. And then he told him three parables to show what it's like, what it looks like to be ready.

[2:22] The parable of the wise and foolish servants, the parable of the ten bridesmaids, and the parable of the talents. So, be ready. But what does it mean, what does it look like to be ready for his return?

Well, today's passage, the passage we just heard read, it's pretty clear, right? When Christ came the first time, it was to rescue and to redeem. But when he comes the second time, what we need to be ready for, he is coming in judgment.

So, to be ready to meet the judge, you need to make sure that you will stand before him, guiltless.

And now, these parables, right, the servants, the bridesmaids, the talents, could look very much like a to-do list for that. A list of things we need to get done to look good on that day, right?

But if that was a to-do list, if this is how you dealt with your sin, Jesus would not be saying in the very next chapter, this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins.

[3:37] And look with me at today's text, verse 34. Then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

And inheritance isn't something you earn, you don't do a checklist in order to get it, right? It's something that's gifted. So, no, these signs of readiness are not a to-do list.

They don't make us ready, but like the antibodies, they are the signs that we're ready, right? The attitudes and actions of these parables are not your salvation.

Christ's blood is your salvation. But like the antibodies that chase a virus, the attitudes and actions of these parables inevitably follow after your salvation.

If you have mono, your body will produce mono antibodies. If you have been born again, you will actually serve your God, the parable of the talents.

[4:42] If you have hepatitis, your body will produce hepatitis antibodies. And if you've been born again, you will have a hope and a glad expectation in Christ, the parable of the bridesmaids.

Why? Why? Well, because when Jesus redeems you from the guilt of your sin and makes you ready for that day, the day of judgment, he also gives you new spiritual life at the same time, right? New birth causes us to be born again. And he gives us a new heart and frees us from the slavery of sin and imparts to us his Holy Spirit. So in our salvation, we are given new life and new life lives. The wise servant, right, turned his back on sin and worldliness that the foolish servant still embraced, the result of the new birth. The wise bridesmaids had an eager expectation for the bridegroom.

That's the result of the new birth. The good and faithful servants served. That's the outpouring, the outflow of the new life in Christ. Right?

[5:51] So these are the results, the signs, the antibodies, if you will, of the new birth. They aren't your salvation itself. Christ himself is. Right? But they are the inevitable effects of that salvation in the life of the believer.

And Jesus has been telling us this since chapter 7, right, when he said, you can recognize a tree by its fruit. And you can recognize a disciple of Christ by the life that their new heart produces.

And today, Jesus draws this section, the signs of readiness, to its climax, to its pinnacle, the final judgment.

Jesus, be ready for that day. And here, in verse 31, that day arrives. And now at the conclusion, he explains this last sign of readiness.

New birth kindles love, an active love for the church, the people of God. How do we know that that's what we're talking about here?

[6:57] Look with me, verse 37. Right? This passage hinges on who are the recipients. Right? Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me.

This last antibody, I'm going to abandon that metaphor real soon. The last sign that we're ready to meet our maker is how did we treat the least of these, his brothers?

Well, who are his brothers? The least of these. Jesus calls no one brothers except his disciples. Throughout the whole sweep of Scripture, the Lord does not call anyone family except those who have repented and believed and been born again.

[8:13] Matthew chapter 10. We've seen this. Whoever gives one of these little ones, the least of these, even a cup of cold water, because he is a disciple.

Truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. Then in Matthew chapter 12. While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside asking to speak with him.

But he replied to the man who told him, who is my mother and who are my brothers? And stretching out his hand towards his disciples, he said, here are my mother and brothers.

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. John chapter 1. He, that is Jesus, came to his own and his own people did not receive him, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, that is, those who have trusted in Christ.

He gave the right to become children of God. Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Friends, we're not all God's children, no matter what the saying says, right?

[9:24] We're not all Christ's brothers. That right belongs only to those who have been adopted by God's grace. So when Jesus says, verse 40, as you did to the least of these, my brothers, you did to me.

This passage is not about philanthropy and ministry or mercy ministry in general. This passage means that the last sign that we have life in Christ, that our sins have been forgiven, that we have new birth and are ready for that day, is how we treat Christ's family, his church.

Now, when we say that, right, this passage is about loving the church, the people of God, we can fall into a false corollary, right? Where we say, well, therefore, it doesn't really much matter how we treat everybody else.

Let us not be guilty of that mentality, right? The scriptures command us, right, to love our neighbor, regardless of their spiritual condition, to love even our enemies.

And so the last person you saw in need, the last person who enraged you, right, the Lord calls you. [10:34] And your new life enables you. And his Holy Spirit indwelling you empowers you to move towards that person in love, right?

That marks the Christian off from the world, that you will know them by their fruit. So we are certainly called to love for non-Christians. And yet Jesus here has a particular concern for our love to the people of God.

Right, Matthew 24 and 25 are the most extensive teaching on the last things that come from the lips of Jesus. And here at its climax, he says this is a defining feature, the climactic defining feature of those who belong to him, that they love and serve his church.

Now, the global nature of the church, friends, means that we have family from every tongue and tribe and nation. It means that we have family in every economic situation.

It means that we have family in every career path, in every hobby, in every family situation. I mean, some of you listen to country music, and I still want to pastor you, right?

[11:49] That's a miracle of God, right? Why do Christians love Christ's people? And why does that transcend all earthly divisions and barriers?

Because Jesus Christ, who died for me, is the most important thing in my life. And if he's also the apple of your eye, we have a bond that transcends every human affiliation.

And it's not just we have an interest in common, as if Christianity were a shared hobby. And it's not just we have a priority in common, as if Christianity were a cause or a movement, right, that we both support.

It is this. We have a person, a Savior, a Lord in common. I am raised with Christ, my Savior and my God, and so are you.

That's more solid than the ground we stand on. More real than any other interest or cause or affiliation that we could possibly attain to.

[13:08] Right? And it's not abstract. It's not, you know, a cause or an interest that's somewhere out there. It's personal because he is a person.

It's relational, right? We have a favorite person in common. I worship Jesus Christ.

And if you do too. I have a higher interest in common with you than any other label or grouping that this world could conceive.

That's why Christians love his church. And, friends, I see the evidence of this kinship, this family bond among this church family.

And I'm encouraged by that, right? Some of you get together every single week in community groups to chase after Christ together with people with whom you have very little in common in earthly terms.

[14:16] That's not a normal thing that happens in this world, right? Some of you give sacrificially of your time and of your energy to serve members of your church family that you wouldn't even know existed.

Right? In earthly terms, accept that love for Christ has brought you together in his church. Some of you have traveled great distances to serve Christians in far-off places.

People you've never before met. Why? You served them out of a mutual love for Christ, for his church, and for his mission.

The world doesn't do that. Right? This is a feature of the new birth. And that's why it's a sign of readiness. And what if that's not you? Right?

What if you find yourself not so much loving the saints of God? Right? And here I'm talking about bon, an affection in the heart.

[15:26] But also, as Christ has been talking in chapter 25, practical love indeed. Right? So, in our hearts, that we love him and find a kinship with those who love him too. A kinship that supersedes human barriers like economics and politics and race.

And indeed, visiting or maybe perhaps today texting, right? The sick. Feeding or joining the meal trains, right? For those who need it. What if that's not you? If you don't find that in yourself, because we're called here to examine ourselves, I think the first thing, ask someone else.

Do you see this in me? Because often, for good or for ill, we are the worst judge of ourselves. In today's passage, those who are both on the right and on the left are surprised at the judgment of their conduct, right?

So, ask a brother or sister in Christ, do you see this in me? And further, ask the Lord to stoke that love in you. Perhaps you are truly born again and are quenching the Spirit.

Ask him to ignite what lies dormant in your heart. Wait, when loving someone is hard, ask the Spirit to impress upon your heart that they are your family.

[16:47] That they are Christ's own. And that loving and serving them is worshiping your Lord as well. As much as you did it to them, you did it to me, Christ says.

Or, if these signs of readiness, of spiritual life in chapters 24 and 25 aren't evident in you, perhaps you are not ready for that day.

And you need spiritual life. But don't go, as we've said, I promised to get rid of this analogy, but don't go to the pharmacy looking for antibodies, right? That's going about it backwards.

That's gluing apples to a bush and calling it an apple tree. Cobbling together some of these signs is not the way into life.

Believe in the Lord Jesus. Your need for Him, your guilt before Him, His divine death as your substitute, His resurrection as your victory, and His offer of free grace.

[17:51] And you will be saved. And He will cause you to be born again. And you will find that these signs of readiness grow up in you. Right?

And this sign, like the others in chapter 24 and 25, it's visible, right? It will be visible on that last day. It's also visible today. Because He says in John chapter 13, that this is actually a public declaration. This supernatural, supernatural love for the people of God. By this, all people. Our love for one another. All people whom know that we are Christ's disciples.

This is evangelistic at its core as well. It's a visible outward sign of an invisible inward reality. It's visible to the world around us, John 13. And today's passage, it will be visible. In His second coming too. At His judgment seat.

[19:02] Excuse me. Now, speaking of judgment. There are two outcomes in verse 46, right?

One good, one bad. Now, before we get to the part we want to get to, the positive stuff, right? Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.

Let's tackle the hard part. The part that sets us on edge and makes us ill at ease. Verse 41. Depart from me, you cursed.

Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Friends, Scripture is clear. That every single person, their starting point, our default state, the place where every human being begins, is this category of the damned.

It is only those who have been redeemed who belong, verse 34, to those who are blessed by the Father. Everyone begins life separated and against God.

[20:21] And unless that changes, this is everyone's faith. Now, isn't that excessive? Isn't that extreme? To be grouped with the devil and his angels?

To be treated as an enemy of God? To be punished eternally? You know, certainly, we might say, right? You know, Hitler deserves that, right? And Stalin and Pol Pot, right?

But everyday people? Really? And apparently, not for active sins of commission, things he actually did like Hitler, right?

But for neglecting, right? As much as you did not do this. Neglecting generosity and hospitality. For sins of omission is eternal hellfire.

A just and a good sentence. I think the answer is hidden implicitly in verse 31.

[21:28] When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Hell sounds extreme to us because we have not seen how extreme is God's glory. If we rightly understand the majesty, the magnitude of the one we sin against, we would understand the magnitude of our guilt.

We would understand how. So let's try to recalibrate our understanding of just how great God is. And what it means to sin against Him. Now something we easily overlook in that first verse, verse 31, is the mention of the angels. They're actually very helpful in understanding God's glory. So let's consider them. How glorious are the angels? They are not Hallmark card, you know, chubby babies with bows and arrows.

[22:51] That's not the angels. Angels possess such majesty, the scriptures show us, that when people meet them, we must be pulled up off the ground.

Either we cower to the ground in terror, or we bow to the ground trying to worship them. when was the last time the sight of something, the sight of something brought you physically to your knees? Has it ever? Have you ever beheld anything like that? When were you last so terrified that it simply overshadowed your fight or flight reflexes and you just collapsed to the ground?

Ever? Or on the flip side, when was the last time you saw such splendor and glory that you were so in awe that you spontaneously bowed your body to the dust in worship?

have you ever? That's what happened to the apostle John when he met an angel.

[24:17] In Revelation chapter 19, pay careful attention to the angel's response to him. The angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And he said to me, these are the true words of God. Then I fell down at his feet to worship him.

That's John. But he said to me, you must not do that.

I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus worship God.

The angel was so majestic that John fell at its feet in worship.

but the angel responded, I am a fellow servant with you. The angel is so much greater than we are but says, oh, don't worship me.

We're in the same category. Compared to God, we're no different. We're both just servants. the angels whom we are prone to worship are closer to us than they are, either of us are, to the majesty of God Almighty.

[25:48] The angels who, to our eyes, max out the glory scale, right? John says, this is it, this is what I'll worship. sits right about where we do on that same glory scale when compared to the living God.

Conceive of the greatest glory you can fathom, worthy of terror and worship. worship. And then realize that that angel that you're conceiving of thinks he's in the same category as you and covers his face in worship before the great king.

it's like standing before a great mountain only to realize that it is but a grain of sand at the foot of a far greater peak.

Psalms chapter 8 tells us that in the grand scheme of things we're only a little lower than the angels whose glory we would spontaneously worship. just a little lower because God's glory friends it's asymptotal it breaks the scale and so when we talk about the majesty of God we are talking about glory unfathomable and then the justice of hell comes into view.

Your sin my sin is so great because it is against so great a God an infinitely incomprehensibly great God glory beyond glory and it is him we reject and spurn and disdain every time we choose sin there are no small sins no trivial sins sin the guilt of but one sin one transgression against this brilliance is unending what guilt do we then bring down upon ourselves in a lifetime of sin hell seems unjust excessive only to those who have not well considered the storm that is

[28:34] God's glory and his majesty but hell is just in the eyes of the one who knows that God almighty is holy holy holy when the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him then he will sit on his glorious throne of judgment and no one will think lightly of their sin on that day but the default position for every man woman and child when the son of man comes in his glory when he sits on his glorious throne is to be

found guilty and these verse 46 will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life oh that we here would all be found among the righteous on the right side of the king how may we see the kingdom of God how may we as we turn our eyes towards the communion table right we've been talking a lot about God's glory glory that same glory that makes even the angels hide their faces that instantly convicts us of guilt that will one day halt the flow of history glory that same glory hung on a cross for us as intense as extreme as the reality of hell there is an equally glorious flip side the God whose glory breaks the scales and transcends our comprehension against whom we have sinned against whom we have heaped up guilt and guilt and guilt chose to serve our sentence for us because verse 31 his coming in judgment is his second coming but in his first coming one where he warns us about the coming day when he walked the paths of Galilee in the streets of Jerusalem what was that ministry for what was that coming for Matthew chapter 20 the son of man in his first coming came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many the old hymn says in my place condemned he stood bought my pardon with his blood his glory surpasses understanding and in the cross of Christ the one clothed in endless majesty died naked for me for me the one whom angels choirs praise forever died alone the one whose acclaim is from everlasting to everlasting died in shame for me what we deserved for sinning against his matchless glory he submitted his glory to exactly that shame and punishment at his cross this is the price of our redemption!

love of God what do we do to earn our place on the shepherd's right side you can't add to what's already been done but you can run to Jesus and see him hanging on that cross the Lord of glory spectacular beyond imagining given for you and you can cling to him in love love like that it draws us I guarantee it will change you and those signs that we've been talking about in 24 and 25 will become true of you and love like that I guarantee you it will fill your cup for eternity come you who are blessed by my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world let's pray!

O great God of glory what can we say besides we thank you and we praise you there is none like you there is none like you amen a