

Active Faith  
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Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus' words in this passage are a mixture of warning, challenge, and hard truth about judgment and eternal punishment. [Aren't you glad you came this morning? ☺]

Here's a question to ponder in your heart: Do you tend to move quickly past the hard parts of Scripture? I don't mean the sections in Leviticus about mildew and skin diseases — we all "speed read" through those. I mean the hard truths and warnings about God's judgment and the eternal consequences of following or rejecting Christ.

Some parts of Scripture are comforting, and some are challenging, but all Scripture is from God and necessary for our spiritual health (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible is not a "salad bar" where we pick only the parts we like or understand. If we continually skip the hard parts of God's Word, we can become spiritually malnourished because God uses ALL Scripture to shape us.

Another question to ponder in your heart: When you bring an unsaved friend to church do you secretly hope the message that week won't be about judgment? "Hey maybe bring up eternal punishment in visits five or six but not in week one. Talking about judgment is so harsh. Just talk about God's love in the first few weeks!" Is warning someone about danger harsh or loving? We know the right answer, but it's still hard.

The Point: One day Christ will return to earth, and all people will face His judgment. Those who have trusted Him as Savior and Lord will be welcomed into His eternal Kingdom, while those who reject Him will face eternal punishment. When Christ returns, He will also review how people lived on earth. The way we served others in Christ's name will reflect the reality of our relationship with Him. Each day we have the opportunity to write that story by serving those in need in His name.

Jesus' teaching in this passage isn't harsh; it's loving. I would sum it up with two simple phrases: Love Warns & Love Works.

**(NLT)** — **31** "But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. **32** All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. **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 creation of the world. **35** For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. **36** I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' **37** "Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to

drink? **38** Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? **39** When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' **40** "And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!' **41** "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. **42** For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. **43** I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' **44** "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' **45** "And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.' **46** "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."

- This is another passage about Christ's second coming that has sparked many debates — the timing of events, the nature of the judgment, the Millennium, etc.
- While those discussions matter, I don't want us to get bogged down in speculation. Instead, let's focus on how this truth impacts our lives today.
- We will come back how LOVE WARNS (the sheep and the goats) but first let's look at LOVE WORKS. Jesus is challenging us to ACTIVE FAITH.
- Multiple passages address this. James chapter two might be the most convicting:
- **James 2:14–17 (NLT)** — **14** What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? **15** Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, **16** and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? **17** So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.
- Key phrase: faith PRODUCES good deeds. Jesus is not saying we are saved by doing good deeds. That would violate His own words in **John 6:28–29 (NLT)** — **28** They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?" **29** Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent."
- Good deeds are not the ROOT of our salvation they are the FRUIT from it.
- John 3:16 says God so LOVED the world that He GAVE His Son. Luke 19:10 says, "the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." Action verbs!
- We are saved by Christ's "work" on the cross. Salvation proves, LOVE WORKS!
- We all know John 3:16 but what about 1 John 3:16? **1 John 3:16–18 (NLT)** — **16** We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. **17** If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person? **18** Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.
- Verse 40: 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'
- Because the term "brothers and sisters" is used some debate the meaning:

- Needy and vulnerable people in general
- Believers or followers of Christ
- Persecuted Christians or Gospel messengers specifically
- Some end-times views: Jewish believers during the Tribulation
- What isn't up for debate: Jesus always ministered to hurting and vulnerable people, and He expects His followers to respond to others with compassion.
- Caring for the "least of these" is how we show our love for Christ and others! That is how LOVE WORKS!
- Love also WARNS and that is what Jesus is doing in this passage.
- Verses 31-34 say, one day Jesus will return in glory as King and Judge over all people. Everyone will stand before Him, and He will separate those who truly belong to Him from those who do not, just as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Those who trusted and followed Him will be welcomed into His eternal Kingdom, a place God prepared for His people from the very beginning.
- Technical point: Wiersbe argues that this judgment should not be confused with the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20:11–15. He believes this judgment occurs on earth immediately after Armageddon, rather than being part of one "general judgment."<sup>i</sup>
- People often say, *"Why do Christians harp on judgment? Jesus was all about love and acceptance."*
- Here's a fact: Jesus spoke more about hell and final judgment than any other person in the New Testament.<sup>ii</sup> (See the scripture references in the footnote)
- I confess that I got the idea for the phrase LOVE WARNS from something I heard John MacArthur say in a sermon: *"Love warns. Warning people about judgment is not unloving; it is loving. A God of indifference would remain silent, but God is compassionate. Because He desires people to be saved and spend eternity with Him, He lovingly warns about judgment and clearly reveals the way of salvation. He is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9)."*<sup>iii</sup>
- If we are Christ-followers, we believe that; but putting it into practice can be hard.
- How can we lovingly warn people about eternity without pushing them away?
  - LOVE warns, it doesn't shame or condemn. It starts with love.
  - It has been said, *"Christians should speak about hell with tears in their eyes, not anger in their voices."*
  - We must build relationships
  - Listen to people's struggles and questions
  - Let our actions support our message ("Love Works")
  - Avoid a harsh, condemning tone remembering, *"No one was ever won to Christ at the end of an argument."*
  - Keep pointing people to the hope of the Gospel, not just the fear of judgment
  - REMEMBER: Trust the Holy Spirit to change hearts. We do the loving and sharing but HE does the SAVING. Prayer is our greatest preparation.
  - People are more likely to receive hard truth when they genuinely sense love, humility, and hope behind it.
  - Truth without love can become harsh. Love without truth can become shallow. Jesus modeled both grace and truth (John 1:14).

### So, What's the Takeaway?

- LOVE WORKS & LOVE WARNS – It all begins with love.
- Hebrews 13:16 (NLT) — 16 And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.
- Caring for the "least of these" is how we show our love for Christ and others!
- Love also WARNS.
- In *It's a Wonderful Life*, young George Bailey worked for a pharmacist named Mr. Gower, who was grieving the death of his son in the war. Distracted by grief, Mr. Gower accidentally prepared poison instead of medicine for a customer. Young George realized what had happened and refused to deliver it. Mr. Gower became angry and even struck George before finally realizing the boy had actually saved him from a terrible tragedy.
- George warned him because he cared. Love warns. Real love does not stay silent when someone is headed toward danger.
- If you saw your toddler running toward a fire in the fireplace you would SCREAM to make them stop then you would wrap them in your arms to prove that your warning was an act of love.
- I'm NOT suggesting we scream at people to warn them about eternity without Christ. In fact, please DON'T do that! Instead, build relationship with them with just as much urgency so they will allow you to point them to Christ with love.
- As a practical matter, what should we do with this passage? Skip Heitzig summed up simply and effectively: Get saved, get busy, & get active.
- Let's ask the Holy Spirit to help us show love to others through our works in a way that will open the door to tell them about Jesus. (Matthew 5:16)

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<sup>i</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 93). Victor Books.

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 7:13-14, 21-23; 8:12; 10:28; 13:40-42, 49-50; 22:13; 24:50-51; 25:30, 41, 46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:4-5; 13:23-28; 16:19-31; John 5:28-29.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.gty.org/sermons/2379/the-judgment-of-the-nations-part-2>