

Matthew 25:31-46
November 26, '17
Reign of Christ Sunday

“BLEATING HEARTS”

LIKE MOST OF YOU, I DON'T KNOW A LOT ABOUT SHEEP & GOATS.

I DO KNOW ENOUGH TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE WHEN I SEE ONE OR THE OTHER – UNLESS I'M MOVING QUICKLY UP THE INTERSTATE & SEE SOME ON A HILL SEVERAL HUNDRED YARDS AWAY.

“ARE THOSE SHEEP OR ARE THEY GOATS? OR ARE THEY BOTH SHEEP AND GOATS, MIXED TOGETHER?”

THERE'S ONE THING THAT'S VERY SIMILAR ABOUT BOTH ANIMALS, THOUGH.

THE SOUND THEY MAKE IS THE SAME – OR, AT LEAST IT'S CALLED THE SAME THING.

I ONLY KNOW THIS BECAUSE I LOOKED IT UP.

IN A LIST OF SOUNDS MADE BY MORE THAN A HUNDRED ANIMALS, I FOUND THAT SHEEP & GOATS ARE THE ONLY ONES WHOSE SOUND IS OFFICIALLY CALLED “BLEATING.”

I FOUND THAT INTERESTING & I ALSO FOUND THAT IT WOULD WORK AS A GOOD TITLE IN LOOKING AT THIS PASSAGE.

OF COURSE, A BLEEDING HEART – THAT'S BLEEDING WITH 2 E'S & A “D” – IS A FLOWERING PLANT.

BUT A DICTIONARY DEFINITION TELLS US THAT IT'S ALSO USED TO DESCRIBE “A PERSON WHO DISPLAYS EXCESSIVE CONCERN FOR OTHERS.”

INTERESTINGLY, THE PHRASE CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE 14TH CENTURY & IT WAS USED IN REFERENCE TO ONE SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL.

THAT INDIVIDUAL HAPPENED TO BE - JESUS.

TODAY, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE PHRASE “BLEEDING HEART” IS USED IN A DISPARAGING FASHION.

THAT SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISING BECAUSE THE WORLD TODAY DOES LOOK UPON “EXCESSIVE CONCERN FOR OTHERS” – OR THE WAY OF CHRIST -DISPARAGINGLY.

AND THIS PASSAGE DESCRIBES – QUITE CLEARLY – THE WAY OF CHRIST.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO A SIMPLE QUESTION.

ONE OF THE REQUIRED CLASSES IN SEMINARY IS A COURSE IN “PRESBYTERIAN POLITY.”

EVERY PROSPECTIVE PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER IS REQUIRED TO TAKE IT.

IN THE CLASS, YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BOOK OF ORDER THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW.

YOU MEMORIZE WHOLE SECTIONS OF IT & LEARN ALL THE “DO’S” AND “DON'TS” OF HOW WE OPERATE AS A DENOMINATION.

IN ONE SUCH CLASS, STUDENTS WERE PREPARING FOR THE FINAL EXAM AND ANTICIPATING A SERIES OF MULTIPLE CHOICE OR TRUE-FALSE QUESTIONS.

IT'S ONE OF THE FEW SEMINARY COURSES WHERE OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS SEEM APPROPRIATE FOR AN EXAM.

BUT WHEN THEY ARRIVED FOR THAT FINAL, THEY WERE SHOCKED TO FIND NO MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS – NO TRUE-FALSE, NO MATCHING.

THERE WAS JUST ONE QUESTION – AN ESSAY QUESTION.

THE PROFESSOR SUGGESTED A SPECIFIC SCENARIO THAT A PASTOR MIGHT SOMEDAY ENCOUNTER.

**FOLLOWING THE SCENARIO, HE GAVE THESE INSTRUCTIONS:
“CONSIDER SUCH A SITUATION ARISING IN YOUR CHURCH. THROUGH
THE USE OF THE BOOK OF ORDER & YOUR OWN THEOLOGICAL
UNDERSTANDING, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?”**

IT ALL CAME DOWN TO A SINGLE, SIMPLE QUESTION.

**THE ENTIRE CLASS, THE FULL SEMESTER, THE FINAL GRADE
RESTED ON THE ANSWER TO ONE QUESTION.**

“WHAT WOULD YOU DO?”

**AS WE LOOK AT THIS PASSAGE IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL, I THINK
WE’RE LOOKING AT SOMETHING QUITE SIMILAR.**

**THIS PASSAGE IS KNOWN AS THE PARABLE OF THE FINAL
JUDGMENT.**

**IN REALITY, THOUGH, IT’S NOT A PARABLE BUT RATHER A LOOK
AHEAD AT A REAL EVENT THAT WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE FUTURE.**

**IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL, THESE WORDS GIVE US THE FINAL
PUBLIC TEACHING OF JESUS & WE SHOULD, THEREFORE, CONSIDER
THEM OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.**

**THIS PASSAGE WE CALL “THE FINAL JUDGMENT” COULD JUST
AS EASILY BE LABELLED “THE FINAL EXAM.”**

THAT’S REALLY WHAT THIS IS.

**LIKE THAT SEMINARY CLASS, THERE IS BUT ONE QUESTION –
NOT “WHAT WOULD YOU DO?” BUT “WHAT DID YOU DO?”**

THAT’S IT.

NOTICEABLE BY THEIR ABSENCE ARE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING FAITH OR THEOLOGY OR WORSHIP ATTENDANCE OR SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE OR SOCIAL STANDING OR PRAYER LIFE.

JESUS DOESN'T ASK, "*DID YOU GO TO CHURCH EVERY WEEK?*"

HE DOESN'T ASK IF YOUR THEOLOGY WAS ORTHODOX OR IF YOU DAILY STUDIED HIS WORD.

HE DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW HOW MUCH TIME YOU SPENT IN PRAYER.

HE DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW IF YOU HAD A GOOD REPUTATION IN THE COMMUNITY.

HIS QUESTION IS VERY SIMPLE: "*WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN I WAS IN NEED?*"

"WHEN I WAS HUNGRY, DID YOU FEED ME?"

"WHEN I WAS THIRSTY, DID YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING TO DRINK?"

"WHEN I WAS A STRANGER, DID YOU WELCOME ME?"

"WHEN I WAS NAKED, DID YOU CLOTHE ME?"

"WHEN I WAS SICK, DID YOU CARE FOR ME?"

"WHEN I WAS IN PRISON, DID YOU VISIT ME?"

WHAT JESUS IS SAYING HERE IS THAT IT'S NOT OUR CREEDS THAT MATTER, BUT OUR DEEDS.

NOT ONLY COULD WE CALL THIS PASASGE "THE FINAL EXAM," BUT WE COULD ALSO CALL IT "THE GREAT SURPRISE."

THAT'S ONE OF ITS MOST NOTABLE ELEMENTS, ISN'T IT?

THOSE WHO ARE INVITED TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HAD NO IDEA THAT WHEN THEY WERE OFFERING DEEDS OF KINDNESS TO OTHERS, THEY WERE OFFERING THOSE DEEDS TO JESUS HIMSELF.

CONVERSELY, THOSE WHO REFUSED TO OFFER THOSE DEEDS OF KINDNESS, HAD NO IDEA THEY WERE *WITHHOLDING* THEM FROM CHRIST.

WHEN WE LOOK AT THIS PASSAGE, WE LIKE THE FIRST HALF.

WE LIKE THE HALF WHERE JESUS SAYS, “*COME, YOU THAT ARE BLESSED BY MY FATHER.*”

THE SECOND HALF WE CAN DO WITHOUT – THE HALF WHERE JESUS SAYS, “*YOU THAT ARE ACCURSED, DEPART FROM ME INTO THE ETERNAL FIRE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.*”

THAT’S NOT WHAT WE WANT TO HEAR.

WHEN WE COME TO CHURCH, WE WANT TO HEAR WORDS OF COMFORT, ENCOURAGEMENT, JOY, HOPE, PEACE.

WE WANT TO HEAR JESUS SAY TO US, THAT MOST GLORIOUS WORD THAT ENCOMPASSES ALL THOSE THINGS WE COME TO CHURCH TO HEAR – WE WANT TO HEAR HIM SAY TO US – “*COME.*”

WHAT WE *DON’T* WANT TO HEAR WHEN WE COME TO CHURCH IS THAT JESUS MAY SAY TO US THE MOST FRIGHTENING WORDS IMAGINABLE – “*DEPART FROM ME.*”

WE’RE NOT BIG ON JUDGMENT THESE DAYS.

FIRE & BRIMSTONE ISN’T REAL POPULAR AS A SERMON THEME.

BUT TO CONSIDER THE FIRST HALF OF THIS PASSAGE & IGNORE THE SECOND HALF WOULD BE IRRESPONSIBLE.

HALF-TRUTH IS NO TRUTH.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT IS REAL.

JESUS IS COMING AGAIN & HE’S COMING TO SEPARATE THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS – HE’S COMING TO PASS JUDGMENT UPON ALL & HE’S GOING TO DO SO BASED ON ONE QUESTION – “*WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN I WAS IN NEED?*”

THIS MAY BE TROUBLING TO SOME OF YOU.

**THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT JUST DOESN'T SEEM
RIGHT.**

**YOU MAY NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT BOTHERS YOU
ABOUT THIS.**

I THINK *I* KNOW.

IT SOUNDS TOO MUCH LIKE “*WORKS-RIGHTEOUSNESS.*”

**IT SOUNDS LIKE WE'RE TRYING TO *EARN* OUR WAY INTO
HEAVEN.**

THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL.

**NOTICE – JESUS DOESN'T SAY, “*COME, YOU THAT ARE BLESSED BY
MY FATHER. YOU HAVE EARNED YOUR WAY INTO THE KINGDOM.*”**

NO, HE SAYS, “*...INHERIT THE KINGDOM...*”

**AN INHERITANCE IS DETERMINED BY THE GIVER, NOT THE
RECEIVER.**

**NOTICE ALSO THE SURPRISE OF THOSE RECEIVING THE
INHERITANCE.**

THEY DID THOSE THINGS NOT FOR REWARD.

THEY DIDN'T OFFER THEIR LOVE TO WIN ACCOLADES.

**THEY WEREN'T MOTIVATED BY THE FEAR OF HELL OR THE
HOPE OF HEAVEN.**

**THEY ACTED AS THEY DID SIMPLY BECAUSE IT WAS THEIR
NATURE.**

THEY WEREN'T KEEPING SCORE.

THEY WEREN'T TRYING TO PILE UP BROWNIE POINTS.

THEY WEREN'T LOOKING FOR STARS IN THEIR CROWN.

**THEY WERE SIMPLY BEING WHO THEY WERE – THOSE BLESSED
BY GOD WHO HAVE AN INHERITANCE IN HIS KINGDOM.**

THIS IS A PASSAGE THAT CAN BE QUITE FRIGHTENING – AS FRIGHTENING AS ANY PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE.

BUT IT CAN ALSO BE ONE THAT IS AS EXCITING & ENCOURAGING AS ANY PASSAGE AS WELL.

JUST LOOK AT THAT FINAL EXAM.

THIS LIST OF SIX THINGS IS CLEARLY ILLUSTRATIVE & NOT COMPREHENSIVE.

SURELY THERE ARE OTHER DEEDS OF LOVE & KINDNESS THAT CAN BE SHOWN.

A KIND WORD OR A LISTENING EAR CAN DO SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY FOR A DOWNHEARTED SOUL.

A TANK OF GAS OR ASSISTANCE WITH A FLAT TIRE CAN BE A KINDNESS NEVER FORGOTTEN.

AND LOOK AT THE SIX THAT ARE LISTED HERE BY JESUS – FOOD, DRINK, WELCOME, CLOTHING, NURSING CARE & VISITATION.

EVERYONE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DO THOSE THINGS.

HE DOESN'T SAY, "*YOU CURED ME WHEN I WAS SICK.*"

HE SAYS, "*YOU TOOK CARE OF ME.*"

HE DOESN'T SAY, "*YOU PROVIDED AN EXTRAVAGANT WARDROBE FOR ME.*"

HE SAYS, "*YOU CLOTHED ME.*"

HE DOESN'T SAY, "*YOU HELPED ME GET OUT OF PRISON.*"

HE SAYS, "*YOU VISITED ME.*"

EVERY ONE OF US HERE THIS MORNING HAS THE CAPACITY TO PROVIDE THESE MERCIES.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE WEALTHY TO BUY A HAMBURGER & A SOFT DRINK FOR SOMEONE HUNGRY & THIRSTY.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A NURSE TO PROVIDE CARE FOR SOMEONE WHO'S SICK.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE ORDAINED TO VISIT A PRISONER IN JAIL.

EARLIER IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, JESUS TOLD A RICH MAN TO SELL ALL HE HAD & GIVE THE MONEY TO THE POOR.

THERE'S NO SUCH OVER-ARCHING DEMAND HERE.

THE KINDS OF MERCIES THAT JESUS REWARDS ARE WITHIN THE REACH OF EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US.

THEY DON'T REQUIRE PAINFUL SACRIFICE BUT THE PAIN THEY CAN RELIEVE IS EXTRAORDINARY.

SO WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS PASSAGE?

YOU SEE, IT ISN'T ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT JESUS KNEW.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO LIVE AS HE LIVED.

IT'S MORE THAN SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE WITH OUR WORDS.

THE PROOF OF OUR DISCIPLESHIP IS SEEN IN DOING THE THINGS THAT JESUS DID & LOVING AS HE LOVED.

THAT'S WHAT TOUCHES OTHERS.

THAT'S WHAT MATTERS TO THEM.

IT'S NOT WHAT WE SAY.

IT'S HOW WE LIVE.

IT'S THE IRRESISTIBLE DRIVE TO REACH OUT & TOUCH LIVES & MEET NEEDS & HEAL HURTS & RELIEVE PAIN THAT MATTERS.

YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO EVERY DAY.

YOU SEE, IN THIS PASSAGE, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS JESUS USES IS THE WORD "ONE."

"WHEN YOU HAVE DONE IT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE..."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT FOR EVERYONE.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEED THE WORLD.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO VISIT EVERY PRISONER ON THE PLANET.

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO CARE FOR EVERY SICK PERSON ON THE
BLOCK.**

IT'S ONE MEAL, ONE DRINK, ONE COAT AT A TIME.

THAT'S ALL IT TAKES.

**LAST WEEK, I MENTIONED ONE OF THE MANY POSTERS THAT
HUNG ON THE WALL OF MY FIRST CHURCH OFFICE.**

**HERE'S ANOTHER ONE – ONE THAT I'VE SHARED WITH YOU
MANY TIMES - ONE THAT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT TO ME AT THAT
TIME IN MY LIFE.**

**HAVING JUST BECOME AFFILIATED WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH, THE WORDS ON THIS POSTER PROCLAIMED A VERY CLEAR
MESSAGE ABOUT THIS NEW GROUP OF PEOPLE I WAS JUST GETTING
TO KNOW.**

**IT WAS MY INTRODUCTION TO THE PRESBYTERIAN WAY OF
BEING A CHRISTIAN.**

***“THE LIVING CHRIST IS WHAT I LONG TO SEE,
I CANNOT LEAN ON WHAT USED TO BE,
SO SHUT YOUR BIBLE & SHOW ME HOW,
THE CHRIST YOU TALK ABOUT IS LIVING NOW.”***

**WE ARE CALLED TO SHOW THE WORLD THE LIVING PRESENCE
OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH OUR DEEDS OF LOVE, KINDNESS,
SACRIFICE & SERVICE.**

**IF THAT MAKES US “BLEATING HEARTS,” THEN LET THE
BLEATING BEGIN! AMEN.**

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