

Sermon Series: TRANSFORMATION

Sermon: "Unto the Least of These"

Text: Matthew 25: 31 - 46

Reflection on the sermon: What new insights did you gain from this message?

Examination:

Begin by reading the entire passage. Many theologians see this as one of the clearest teachings of Jesus on the final judgment. If you were in the group of people who first heard these words from Jesus – how do you think you would have responded?

- What are your feelings/emotions?
- What questions do you have for Jesus?

- How does this text support or differ from what has been your understanding of the Final Judgment?
 - What do we learn about the future of the righteous and the future of the cursed?

- Do you think of this passage as a parable? Why or why not?

How does this teaching relate to Ephesians 2: 8, 9? What about James 2:17? Debates consistently occur about the tension between the spiritual and social aspects of ministry – how does this passage speak to this tension?

- Where do you hear and see grace and mercy?

Make a list of the differences (attitudes and actions) between the sheep and the goats? We see in the text that both the sheep and the goats refer to Jesus as "Lord" (vs. 37 & 44). Read Matt. 7:21.

- How does this verse enlighten our understanding of the Lordship of Jesus in our lives?

Reflect upon, describe and discuss the six works of mercy in verses 35 and 36.

Verse 40 has been described as one of the most startling and breathtaking statements in all of the New Testament. Why?

- What do we learn about the person of Jesus from this?

"Jesus is repelled by heartlessness" (See vs. 45). How can we keep our hearts pliable and responsive to the plight of the poor and suffering?

Five Implications for Application:

1. Neither the righteous nor the cursed recognized Jesus in the suffering one. The implication is that it is best to assume that we encounter Jesus in *anyone* in need. How would your behavior change if you treated those in need as if they were Jesus?
2. The acts of mercy Jesus describes are exceedingly simple - no one will be able to say on the Day of Judgment: "That wasn't my gift".
3. Two characteristics we see in the 'sheep': initiative and vulnerability. What are some practical ways we can take initiative and open ourselves up to the hurting?
4. This passage assumes face-to-face interaction with those in need. Share some ways this can become a reality for each person in the class.
5. Note the seriousness and finality of this teaching of our Lord – let's spur each other on!