

Dear Pastor, Will You Repent With Me?

by David Servant

David Servant challenges pastors to confront the reality of their ministries in light of Jesus' teachings on service and judgment.

Scripture: Matthew 7:22, Matthew 25:36, Luke 6:46, Revelation 3:17

Topics: "Judgment Day", "Serving Others"

Description

David Servant shares a personal account of his awakening to the truth of Jesus' teachings on the judgment of the sheep and goats, emphasizing the importance of sacrificial service to the poor and suffering members of Christ's body as a demonstration of true love for Jesus. Through a series of parables and teachings from Matthew 25, he highlights the sobering reality that many professing Christians may be shocked to find themselves condemned on judgment day due to their lack of genuine love and service to those in need. He challenges pastors and preachers to examine their ministries and the actions of their congregations, urging them to align with Christ's teachings and prioritize serving the less fortunate as an expression of their faith.

Transcript

The greatest crisis I faced during my two decades as a pastor was not the result of a disagreeable deacon, a financial deficit, an egocentric worship leader, or a church gossip. Rather, it was due to an encounter with the Holy Spirit and God's Word.

It all began when I read the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation, which contain Jesus' opinion of seven churches in Asia Minor. I noticed that His opinion of some of those churches was considerably different than their opinion of themselves. The congregation at Laodicea, for example, considered themselves to be "rich" and in "need of nothing," while He considered them to be "wretched and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Quite a contrast.

I began to wonder what Jesus thought of my church and ministry. I knew He must have an opinion. To think otherwise would be absurd. He has an opinion about everything, and His opinion is always right.

It occurred to me that He would one day tell me His opinion. When I stood before Him, there would be no doubt in my mind what He thought of my church and ministry.

At the time, I believed my church was one of the best, and that the numerical growth we were experiencing was sure evidence of God's blessing. All the indicators were positive. Yet I had a concern: What if my perspective was slightly skewed?

If it was, I figured it would be much better to learn it then rather than discover it when I stood before the Lord. When I stood before Him it would be too late to change anything. Now there was still opportunity to make adjustments.

I also figured that Jesus would surely be willing to tell me if, in some way, my ministry wasn't pleasing to Him. So I decided to ask Him what He thought, fully convinced that if I was sincere, He'd show to me anything He might want me to change.

He answered my prayer in a way I never imagined. He impressed me to read Matthew 25:36-41. (Take note: I've since learned that God is not likely to reveal His unique will for me if I'm not even following His general will for everyone, as revealed in His Word.) There in Matthew 25 I read Jesus' foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and the goats. I had read it many times before, but this time it was different. I noticed that Jesus was not speaking to the multitudes, but to His closest disciples (see Matt. 24:3). According to Mark's Gospel, they were Peter, James, John and Andrew (see Mark 13:3). What Jesus said had direct application to them. He wanted them to be prepared for the judgment of the sheep and goats. It was plain as day. Jesus did not want any of them to find themselves among the goats.

Jesus told Peter, James, John and Andrew that, one day, people from all the nations (literally "ethnic groups," of which there are thousands) will be gathered before Him. They will be separated into two categories. Each group will hear Him say one of two things. They will either hear Him say, "I was hungry and you fed Me" or, "I was hungry and you did not feed Me." They will either hear Him say, "I was thirsty and you gave Me a drink" or, "I was thirsty and you did not give Me a drink." They will either hear Him say, "I was naked and you clothed Me" or, "I was naked and you did not clothe Me." And there are three other similar contrasting statements about which Jesus solemnly forewarned His closest disciples. On the basis of those six criteria, those before Him will either be cast into the eternal fire or will inherit His eternal kingdom.

Jesus also made clear that those who serve Him in those six ways actually do so by serving the "least of these" among His family. So His point was inescapable: Those who truly love Jesus express their love for Him by sacrificial service to the poor and suffering members of His body.

The Holy Spirit then asked me this question: "If everyone in your congregation died today and stood at the judgment of the sheep and goats, how many would be sheep and how many would be goats? More specifically, in the last twelve months, how many people in your congregation have provided food for a hungry believer in Christ? How many have provided water for a thirsty Christian? How many have provided clothing for a naked follower of Jesus? How many have opened their home, or provided shelter, for a homeless believer? How many have visited a believer who is sick or incarcerated?"

I then realized that my ministry needed monumental adjustments. It was like a sword was being driven through my heart. I knew that the majority of those in my congregation were in the goat category and that I was much to blame. I had never told them of the importance of the things Jesus listed in Matthew 25:31-46. We were American Christians, but not biblical Christians. Our Jesus existed to serve us rather than to make us servants. My gospel was deficient. It had perverted God's grace. I realized that I had been missing the mark by a million miles, straining out gnats and swallowing camels, building a church but not

making disciples. We were way off course. If most of us had died at that point in time, we would have died as goats, destined to be condemned.

I was ashamed. I went from believing that I was a successful pastor to realizing that I was a failure in God's eyes. I wept. I confessed. I repented, not just in word, but in deeds. I asked my congregation's forgiveness. I promised that I was going to be a man of God from then on. I declared that I would begin making disciples, as Jesus commanded, from that day forward, teaching them to obey all of Christ's commandments. I put my hand to the plow, and by the grace of God, I have not looked back.

Perhaps you think I overreacted. But I don't. Not in the least. That was just the beginning of what I can only describe as waking up from the dead. Since then, my entire life and ministry have been radically changed. And there have been so many on-going awakenings since then--as I have simply believed more of what Jesus plainly said--that I would hesitate to tell many professing Christians the entire story, knowing they would reject it outright.

To this day I am completely dumbfounded as to how those solemn words of Jesus found in Matthew 25:31-46 escaped my attention during the first two decades of my ministry. And since that day, I've remained astonished that so many professing Christians and Christian leaders live as if those words did not exist. But those words do exist. And anyone who ignores them is surely among the most foolish people who have ever lived. Jesus has told us in advance the correct answers to a test that will determine our eternal destiny.

Facing Up to the Truth

Take note, first of all, that Jesus is not going to ask the sheep or goats if they prayed the sinner's prayer, accepted Jesus as their Savior, read their Bibles, paid their tithes, attended church, or voted for pro-life candidates.

Also take note that many, if not most, professing Christians are goats according to the unmistakable testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why isn't this being shouted from every pulpit in the world?

And there is more to face up to. Those who skim over the surface of Matthew 25:31-46 may suppose that the goats represent the Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, and so on, while the sheep represent all the Christians. The truth is, however, that the sheep and the goats together represent all professing Christians. The sheep are true believers whose faith is alive with love for fellow believers. The goats think they are believers, and they are shocked when they are eternally condemned. Jesus' foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and the goats serves as a warning that there will be multitudes of professing Christians who possess the assurance of their salvation but who will be stunned when they stand before Him as He condemns them to hell forever.

What is the proof of my claim? First, consider the context. Remember that Jesus was speaking in Matthew 25:31-46 to four of His closest disciples (see Mark 13:3). He was not giving an evangelistic sermon to a mixed multitude. He first told those four devoted disciples the parable of the unfaithful servant, which is a warning to hypocrites, that is, those who profess to be what they are not (see Matt. 24:42-51). The highlighted servant in that parable was indeed a servant in the house of his master. He did not start off as being unfaithful. Rather, he became unfaithful when he believed that his master would not return soon. When his master returned unexpectedly, he was caught in his sin, and he was cut in pieces and assigned a place with the hypocrites where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The moral of the story? "Peter, James, John and Andrew, don't become like the unfaithful servant who backslid. Serve faithfully no matter how long My return is delayed. Otherwise even you, currently My most devoted disciples, will find yourselves with hypocrites weeping and gnashing your teeth." Jesus made it clear from the outset of the parable that He was telling it to them for their personal benefit. He said, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42).

Jesus next told His four devoted disciples the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). Again, this was not a parable to motivate unbelievers to repent and get ready for Christ's return. It was a parable to encourage Jesus' true disciples to stay ready for His return. All ten were virgins (they don't represent unbelievers). All ten were waiting for the bridegroom (they don't represent unbelievers). All ten were initially ready (they don't represent unbelievers). But five became unready, and they were ultimately refused entry into the wedding feast.

The moral of the story? "Peter, James, John and Andrew, don't become like the five foolish virgins. Stay alert for My return. Otherwise even you, currently My most devoted disciples, will be refused entry into My wedding feast." Jesus warned them in the one-sentence conclusion of the parable, "Be alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13, emphasis added). What He said was for their benefit. There is no escape from this. It is so obvious that only a theologian could miss it.

Then Jesus told His four devoted disciples the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). A man who was about to go on a journey called "his own slaves" to entrust each of them with some talents. All three servants were servants of their master. All three were entrusted with talents. The one-talent slave was no less a slave of the master than the other two slaves. He does not represent an unbeliever any more than the other two represent unbelievers. All three represent believers.

When the master returned, he rewarded the two slaves who were fruitful. But the one-talent slave had nothing to show. He had been unfaithful, having buried his talent in the ground. His master was very angry, wondering why the one-talent slave hadn't at least deposited his talent in the bank to earn a little interest. Then he ordered that "worthless slave" to be cast "into the outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The moral of the story? "Peter, James, John and Andrew, don't become like the unfaithful one-talent slave. When I return, you will stand before Me, and I expect to receive a return on what I have entrusted to you, even if what I have entrusted you with seems small in comparison to what I have entrusted to others. Otherwise you will be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The fact that Jesus was warning believers, as opposed to unbelievers, in these three parables is so unmistakable that some modern commentators amazingly try to convince us that "the outer darkness" of which Jesus spoke in the first and third parables is actually a place located in the outer fringes of heaven where unfaithful believers will temporarily mourn their loss of rewards! Then, however, He will wipe away their tears and welcome them into His kingdom!

The Sheep and Goats in Context

Finally, after warning four of His devoted followers by means of three parables, Jesus culminated His private sermon to them by telling them something that was not a parable, but rather a certain future event for which they must be prepared--the very judgment He had been repeatedly warning them about in the previous parables. It was His foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and the goats. And the reason He

told them of that future sobering event was very clear--He didn't want them (or any of His professing followers) to be among the goats on that day.

All of the preceding context, as well as the internal evidence, makes it abundantly clear that the judgment of the sheep and goats is not a separating of Christians from Muslims, Buddhists, atheists and so on. It is a judgment of all professing Christians from every nation. Jesus' words in Matthew 25:31-46 had direct application to Peter, James, John and Andrew. Obviously the possibility existed that they could one day tragically find themselves among the goats, just as the possibility existed that they could find themselves like the unfaithful servant in the first parable, the five foolish virgins in the second parable, or the one-talent slave in the third parable. If this were not true then He would have had no need to warn them. But He did warn them, repeatedly. And if it was possible for Peter, James, John and Andrew, it is possible for anyone else who professes to be a follower of Christ.

Notice also that the goats will be surprised at their condemnation. They will call Jesus "Lord," and ask Him, "When did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?" (Matt. 25:44). The implication is that they will believe that if they had seen Him in those pitiful conditions they would have certainly assisted Him. (That is what every professing Christian would think.) They will think that they love Him. But Jesus will declare to them that, if they had loved Him, they would have loved His suffering family. Again, the implication is that they had knowledge of His suffering family, which would hardly be true of most non-professing Christians. These goats had the opportunity to know about and assist suffering believers. But they aren't "those kinds of Christians." No, they are unfaithful servants, foolish virgins, and slaves who buried their talents. Goats.

The Question

Pastor, there is no difference between you and me. You've been entrusted with a ministry to a congregation. Jesus has an opinion of your church and ministry. Sooner or later, you will know exactly what Jesus thinks about your church and ministry.

If everyone in your congregation died today and stood at the judgment of the sheep and the goats, how many would be sheep and how many would be goats? How many of them, because of their love for Jesus, are doing anything to feed hungry believers, clothe naked believers, provide shelter for homeless believers, or visit sick and incarcerated believers? Have you told them of how vitally important these things are? If you died at this very moment and stood at the judgment of the sheep and the goats, would you be a sheep or a goat? If your answer is "goat," then you are a goat.

"But I've studied the Bible in its original languages! I teach from the Bible every week! I pray. I tithe! I'm a spiritual leader! People respect me as such!"

This was also the testimony of the scribes and Pharisees. They all possessed "the assurance of salvation." But they were cast into hell.

"But I prayed the sinner's prayer! I speak in tongues! I've cast out demons!"

In the strongest terms possible, Jesus warned against trusting in such things as proof that one will inherit eternal life. He warned, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" But He will solemnly reply, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:22-23).

"You are robbing people of their assurance!"

Yes, just as John the Baptist, Jesus, all the apostles (see, for example, Luke 3:8, Matt. 7:22-23, 1 Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5-6, Jas. 2:14-17; 2 Pet. 2:1-22, 1 John 2:4-9; Jude 1:3-4), and any other preacher who loves God and people, I am robbing people of their false assurance. Like John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles, my hope is to wake up those in darkness to the plain and solemn truth, so that they will repent and be born again in actuality rather than just in doctrinal theory. Pastors and preachers who are not warning those who think they are sheep but who act like goats are pastors who are helping Satan.

The Decision

When a pastor has been tickling ears and telling people what they want to hear, it is indeed a fearful thing for him to think of actually telling people the truth for the first time. It could cost him his "ministry," at least temporarily. Doves of goats might run for the doors, taking their money with them. He could lose his job and his paycheck. But dear pastor, do you think that the price you will pay for telling the truth will be less than the price you will ultimately pay for continuing to play your present church game? Do you truly believe that you will escape hell when you have helped populate hell?

When you walk up the stairs to your sanctuary platform and pulpit to deliver a message that once again soothes the hardened and deceived hearts of people who are goats according to Christ's revelation in Matt. 25:31-46, you might as well be leaning a ladder onto the cross of Jesus, climbing to the top, and spitting in His tortured face!

He suffered and died to make people holy! His sacred blood was shed to transform sinners into saints! There he hangs, gasping for breath, held by nails, covered with blood, His back ripped to shreds, spat upon and mocked by those who hated Him. All to deliver to His preachers the keys to the kingdom of heaven--a glorious gospel that can deliver sinners from their selfishness through His atoning sacrifice. All to create a community of new creations in Christ who love each other!

Yet those preachers alter the message that He has entrusted to them to take to the entire world. They strip it of all its real power, and use it to deceive those living in darkness, promising them heaven when Jesus has promised them hell! Worse yet, after they have deceived their congregations into believing that they possess what they actually do not possess, they then doubly-deceive them into believing that they can never forfeit what they do not possess! How can such preachers and pastors escape the sentence to hell? How appropriate to this are Christ's words, "Whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him" (Luke 8:18).

"But where can we find followers of Christ who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick or in prison?"

Living in our bubble-world with the rest of the world's elite does indeed blind us. Yet when one-half of the world lives on less than two dollars a day, is it possible that there are any followers of Christ among that group of three billion people? Is it possible that some are hungry, thirsty, in need of clothing or shelter? Might some be ill from drinking undrinkable water? Are there not thousands rotting in prisons for their faith in countries where Christians regularly face brutal persecution?

Tragically, most professing Christians living in wealthy western nations live as if they are unaware of the sufferings of the persecuted church around the world. How the angels must weep!

There should be tens of thousands of Christian ministries that focus on serving the poor and the persecuted among Christ's family around the world. Billions of dollars should be pouring in from the pockets of western Christians and churches to show their love for Jesus by loving His body. Every church should be immersed in involvement, top to bottom. Western Christians should be spanning the globe to find such needs and meet them.

But no. We're goats. Who think we're sheep. Surely Jesus didn't mean what He said in Matthew 25:31-46, right?

While Jesus is hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, homeless and incarcerated, tens of thousands of pastors who profess to love Him ignore His pitiful plight, collecting hundreds of millions of dollars each Sunday from people who also profess to love Him, and those dollars are primarily used to serve the people who gave those dollars, and mostly for things for which you can't find a shred of scriptural support. What money does escape from the goat pen is often just a token fraction, tossed towards Jesus, who sits like Lazarus on the street, longing for a crumb from the rich man's table.

Dear pastor, will you repent with me?

Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? (Luke 6:46).

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