**THAT was Jesus!?**

At the sheep and goat judgment in Matthew 25, the King divides them, welcoming the sheep to inherit the kingdom while telling the goats on His left, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:32-41). Jesus tells both groups that the division is based on their service to Him; but their service is different from how we usually think. It’s so radically different that both groups question it.

Jesus tells the righteous that the reason for their entrance to His Father’s eternal kingdom is, “for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (25:35-36). The righteous respond by asking when they did these things for Him and the King answers, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (25:37-40).

Then Jesus tells those on His left hand, “I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me” (25:42). The goats wonder, “’Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (25:44-45).

When is the last time we saw someone who was hungry and thought about Jesus? Did we actually think, “If that were Jesus, would I feed him/her?” What if at the judgment Jesus says, “That was me!” Giving someone a drink of water is so inexpensive in our culture that we don’t value it enough to think to offer it. But at the judgment, Jesus may say that the thirsty person we ignored and could have helped *was* Him (see also Matt. 10:42).

How do we feel about strangers? The Greek word here is literally “foreigners” or “aliens.” We need to do a serious examination of our thoughts and actions towards strangers. There are many immigrants who are currently suffering in our country. At the judgment, we will hear the King say, “You took me in” or “You did not take Me in.” The same is true of clothing the naked and visiting the sick and imprisoned (25:42-44).

The problem is that when we see an unkempt homeless person, an immigrant who doesn’t speak English, or someone in prison, we feel sure they aren’t Jesus. Jesus wouldn’t be in the situations *they* are in, right? Well, Jesus was hungry (Matt. 4:2; 21:18). Jesus was thirsty (Jn 4:6-7; 19:28). He was a foreigner in a strange land (Matt. 2:13-15). Jesus was arrested and stripped naked (Jn 19:23; 18:12-13). We think we would have jumped right in to help Jesus with acts of compassion and service; but Jesus is saying that if we aren’t doing it now for others, we wouldn’t have helped Him back then. He’s actually saying that if we aren’t doing it now for others – even for the “least,” undeserving people – we aren’t doing it to Him now!

This teaching shouldn’t feel radical to us. Remember what Jesus said: “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:28-31). People we know and don’t know, people who are like us and not like us, are all our neighbors. People who are good or bad, legal or illegal, documented or undocumented, are still our neighbors. People who are employed or unemployed, rich or poor, are our neighbors. Jesus says we should love them. We aren’t allowed to hate them, abuse them, or support those who do. Love them, and you love Jesus. Do good to them, and you do good to Him.

Righteous disciples (sheep) will see Jesus as the motivation to love and serve others. The unrighteous (goats) will not see Jesus in people who are undeserving and vulnerable. Where followers of Jesus see opportunities to express love, compassion, help, and service, the unrighteous will only see liabilities, waste, and threats. In the words of Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all…”

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