

Sunday Update
22nd November 2020

Matthew 25:31-46

31 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." 37 'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" 40 'The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

41 'Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." 44 'They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" 45 'He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." 46 'Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'

"Be kind!" That's been the message we've heard all through the Covid time. We should be kind to one another because we're all suffering together in this. We've seen that expressed by clapping for NHS workers on Thursdays at 8pm for weeks. Supermarkets have tried to express that same kindness to NHS workers and vulnerable groups by making specific hours available to them outwith the melee that was shopping early in the pandemic. We've been encouraged to look out for one another as best we can given the restrictions on movement and contact with other people. We began to ask the question: "What will life be like after Covid? Will we have learned anything about our sense of community or society or other people?" I'm not sure of the answer to that question; I'd like to think that we'll be better, kinder people, but I'm not convinced; the jury is still out, as far as I'm concerned.

There was a news story at the weekend; I'm not sure about my reaction to it and I wonder how you felt. The story centred on a church in London which was holding a baptism service and the headline referred to the fact that the police interrupted the service to break it up. There were 30 people in the building at the service, clearly breaking the guidelines; there were too many people there and the police made half of them leave before they would allow the service to continue. The pastor was asked to explain himself and he is reported to have said: 'Because I believe we serve a greater good. We have a greater good than whatever this is... This is an essential service that we provide. It's about loving our neighbour, and you can talk with a number of people here who are extremely vulnerable, homeless or on the verge of being very isolated.' I'm not sure that this is about being kind; if the pastor wants to be kind to vulnerable people, then he should be telling them to stay at home and keeping them safe, in my opinion! There is something careless about this story.

The last piece of Jesus' teaching that Matthew records in his gospel is this challenging passage about the sheep and the goats. Jesus talks about a time when He (the Son of Man) comes in His glory and He will judge us; the criteria for judgement are centred on the whole question of our kindness. Some people have found this passage controversial in two ways: first of all, some have suggested that this contradicts the whole ethos of the gospel, that Jesus is judging us by what we do, rather than us being saved by faith. Secondly, a whole lot of ink has been used trying to work out who are "these brothers of mine" in verse 40 – who is it that we're supposed to be helping, that allows us to be doing this for Jesus? We" come back to these questions before the end!

Jesus speaks about two groups of people, whom He characterises as sheep and goats, I suspect just because He is using the notion of a shepherd dividing up his animals. There is nothing here about the characteristics of either sheep or goats!! Both groups are addressed by the King: the first group is commended for its kindness, looking after the King when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison. They were kind to the King in all of these circumstances. Quite naturally, they are taken aback by this because they don't know when they ever did any of this for the king; you'd remember if the Queen came to tea! So the king says to them: *"whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* (verse 40) Being kind to other people, somehow is being kind to Jesus. On the other hand, the second group is accused by the King of having done none of these things for him. Again, the same question is asked – "when did we ignore you?" We can guarantee that we'd never ignore the king! The same answer comes back: whenever you ignored "one of these brothers of mine, you ignored me!" Judgement is set!

You may never have heard of Mary Glover. She lived in Washington DC, was a cook in a day care centre who made little money, but she mentored Jim Wallis who has become a powerful Christian leader in the USA. They used to run a food distribution centre on a Saturday morning, a precursor to the whole foodbank movement; people would stand in line for a bag of groceries. Mary would always pray before the centre opened and this was her prayer: "Lord, we know that you will be coming through this line today, so Lord, help us to treat you well. Amen." There is something there about an instinctive response to people in need, no matter who they are. Any attempt to define "these brothers of mine" seem to me to want to narrow down the people to whom we are kind, rather than that kind of instinctive response, open to be kind to anyone in need. Who do you see in need today? To whom can we be kind this week? How can we be kind to our community this week, or over Christmas? I love the idea of this being an instinctive reaction to what we see; then our desire to be kind has simply become part of us; we do kind deeds because we are kind people.

Do we do kindnesses so that God will save us? *"Faith by itself, if it not accompanied by action, is dead... I will show you my faith by what I do"* (James 2:17,18) In his letter, James spells out this big question. The whole section in James 2:14-26 is well worth a read in the light of this question today. Am I saved by my faith or by what I do? Well, the whole Bible will tell us that we are saved by faith; it is faith that connects us to Jesus; it is by faith that we enjoy the blessings and benefits of what Jesus has done. But, that faith needs to be put into practice and the insight that James gives us is that faith that is not put into practice is dead. Being kind in the ways that Jesus suggests in Matthew 25 is one way of putting our faith into practice, the fruit of our faith. Jesus saves us by faith, but that faith needs to be put to work by kindness and care for people in need.

Be kind! It is wonderfully simple. Be kind to the people you meet, whoever they are and wherever you meet them. Be kind to the people you meet every day, every hour of the day; be kind to people you meet only once and don't even know their name. It is wonderfully simple. I loved the piece in the story

when the first group of people were quite unaware they had done anything for the king; all they had seen were people who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or in prison; they had seen people in need and had been kind to them. It is so simple! That's what we see and we should be kind to people we see who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or in prison – don't make it any more complicated than that. Simply, be kind!

Prayer: Father, we thank You for Your loving kindness, by which You have cared for us; we thank You for the kindness of strangers that we have tasted at many times of our lives, and through these last few months of lockdown. Help us to be kind to others, whoever they are and wherever we meet them; by our kindness may their lives be made better.

*Day by day, dear Lord of you
Three things I pray:
To see you more clearly,
To love you more dearly,
To follow you more nearly,
Day by day.*

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- To be kind! In every situation and circumstance, across the UK, pray that people be kind to one another and that kindness to others should be the value by which everyone behaves.
- For those who feed the hungry by foodbanks: the Trussel Trust, the foodbanks in Edinburgh, people who need to go there because they don't have enough food to last the week; those who are having to choose between food to eat and heating to keep them warm.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff as the numbers in hospital start to climb again; for care home staff such as Lorimer House, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some coming to the end of furlough, going back to work; others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; people for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Look ye saints the sight is glorious <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YenMPYYvpsE>

Jesus is the Name we honour
We are the church together
Seek ye first the kingdom of God
By faith we see the hand of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POmIxtEr9Rk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Weugc4TPwrM>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uo76XUt0tO4>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXB8ihpUpE>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS The next issue of “EVERY DAY WITH JESUS” Booklet for November and December 2020 is now available and please contact Ian Aitken for a copy. Also, new issues of the “WORD FOR TODAY” Booklet and “WORD 4u2TODAY” Booklet for Young People for November and December 2020 and January 2021 and “OUR DAILY BREAD” for December 2020 and January and February 2021 are also available and please contact Michael Merriman for a copy.. Let the Bible feed you.



King of compassion

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Lord Jesus,
may we keep other people in our hearts
as we worship with joy;
may we remember those
who are fearful or crying today;
let us be filled with your compassion.
Amen.



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Question...



Would you rather....

Be kind to someone or be shown kindness?

Be a sheep or a goat?

Help or be helped?

Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in Matthew 25:31-46. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2025%3A31-46&version=ERV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage, or watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWSkdx-XwWY>

If you want to make it more interactive, come up with a noise or action for a sheep and a goat. Each time one is mentioned in the story, do the appropriate noise or action.

Talk together...

In today's Bible passage, Jesus tells a story about a shepherd sorting sheep and goats to show how God separates the kind from the unkind.

- What did the people, described as sheep in the story, have in common?
- What was the last thing someone did that made you feel cared for?
- How does God want us to treat people?
- Can you think of anyone you could show kindness to this week?
- As a family, come up with a list of 10 things you can do this week to help each other and others.



Caring for others doesn't earn us rewards from God. God won't love us more if we help others, and he won't love us less if we are selfish sometimes. But we should want to love people and show them care because God loves us, and them. These verses remind us that it is important we learn to see everyone as God sees them- as valuable and being worthy of care.

Pray together...

Prayer washing line – You'll need: string/washing line, pegs, paper, pens.

If the weather is suitable then you could do this outside using a washing line. If inside tie a line of string across the room. Think about situations or people in your family, community, in the world where there are problems or difficulties. On paper write or draw prayers for those who need help and peg them on the string. Spend time reading what others have written and praying for those that need help. Finally pray, "Loving Jesus, help us instinctively want to help those in need. Show us what we can do. Amen."

Praise together...



Nobody loves me like you by Chris Tomlin:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SG IXFEO8yE>

Challenge...

Have a bowl of sweets such as skittles or smarties (something with lots of colours!) How quickly can you sort the sweets into piles of each colour? How about if you only use one hand?

Act together...



Reverse Advent calendar: Find a large box and decorate it, either with pens and craft materials, or wrapping paper. Use it to collect gifts for a reverse Advent calendar. Research a local foodbank and find out what they need. Then add one thing each day for the next few weeks and once finished, donate the items to your chosen foodbank.

If you're self-isolating, consider shopping online or adding an extra item to your shopping list. Or you could check your cupboards for useful items you might not use (just make sure the use-by dates extend into 2021!)