

# Preparing For Jesus

*42. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*  
(Matthew 24:42-44. NRSV)

*16. John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*  
(Luke 3:16-17. NRSV)

## Message 3

### Be A Sheep; Love The Sheep

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Matthew 25:31-46

Rev. Paul Carter

### Introduction:

As I mentioned last week if you were not here for week one of this series then you will want to get a hold of that either on the internet or at the Welcome Centre because these messages are cumulative. In fact today we are going to see that in this new story Jesus provides us with several themes we have met already and then there is some startling, paradigm shifting NEW MATERIAL that is introduced and it is that new material that we are going to spotlight this morning. Open your Bibles to Matthew 25:31-46.

31. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33. and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35. for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36. I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37. Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38. And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39. And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40. And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' 41. Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42. for I was

hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44. Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" 45. Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (NRSV)

Alright, really quick then let's review the points that this teaching makes that we have already seen in the last two weeks. These are cumulative teachings, each one carries forward the previously introduced ideas and then adds something new. This is what is carried forward:

### **When Jesus Returns He Returns As The Judge**

31. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then **he will sit on the throne** of his glory. 32. **All the nations will be gathered before him** (NRSV)

We saw that last week as well. Here is a little snippet from the description in the Bible of the second coming which we have read two weeks in a row now:

11. Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and **in righteousness he judges** and makes war. (Revelation 19:11. NRSV)

Jesus is faithful and true, he will not be swayed and he cannot be bribed and he will not make mistakes. It goes on to tell us that his eyes are like a flame of fire because he sees what needs judgement and he will not be blinded by our excuses nor be manipulated by our tears. On his head are many crowns because he has ALL AUTHORITY and his judgements will endure. Never forget that. The church of Jesus Christ loses hold of that truth at her peril.

### **The Coming Of The Lord Will Be Sudden And Separating**

Our passage declares:

32. All the nations will be gathered before him, and **he will separate people** one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (NRSV)

Everyone say with me: he will separate people. Understand that. Yes, Jesus prayed that his people would be unified but he also said they would grow up like wheat among the weeds and that they would be separated from those weeds on the last day. This is not new information. Jesus said earlier on:

30. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, **Collect the weeds first** and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' " (Matthew 13:30. NRSV)

Now not to keep picking on the Rapture fans, but doesn't this teaching just throw a wrench into their works? They prefer the idea that the wheat goes first – WAY FIRST. They like the idea that long before the reaping, angels will come and scoop us into the barn and then the weeds will be dealt with while we party it up with Jesus. This teaching of JESUS says the exact opposite! Its time for our theology to reject fiction in favour of fact, amen church? The coming of the Lord will be sudden and separating, a truth we've met before.

### **The Lord Will Be Generous With His Rewards And Severe In His Punishments**

We saw both of these truths last week when we studied the teaching of the talents. The productive and obedient servants received high praise indeed:

"Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' (v.21 and also v.23. NRSV)

But the lazy and disobedient slave receives a very harsh sentence:

30. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 25:30. NRSV)

Two weeks ago in the first teaching of Jesus that we looked at from Matthew 24 it was even worse. There we are told of the wicked servant:

50. the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. 51. He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:50-51. NRSV)

This is a severe statement, uncomfortably severe isn't it? Can I tell you something that amazes me as an observer of Christian community? It amazes me how highly we have developed the ability to divorce these stories from their endings. We love these stories, but we are completely unaware, it seems, of the endings. Everyone loves the story of the sheep and the goats! We focus in on the good stuff: A cup of cold water given in Jesus name is given unto Jesus himself. Praise the Lord! So youth groups stand in line along marathon routes and pass out bottles of water and feel so good about the mercy and kindness of Jesus. Have you read the ending of this story? Most of the people you handed water to are going to be condemned, cut in pieces and thrown into the eternal fires of hell! That's how the story ends! How can we disconnect emotionally from the endings and see these stories as happy tales about God's kindness? Remember always church the warning of the Apostle Paul:

22. Note then **the kindness and the severity of God**: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:22-23. NRSV)

The severity of God reappears in this passage we are looking at today as well:

46. And these will go **away into eternal punishment**, but the righteous into eternal life." (NRSV)

### **Transition:**

These are the teachings and themes we have seen before that are carried forward but this parable adds something new. It is a MASSIVE something new. Jesus says this:

34. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35. for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36. I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37. Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38. And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39. And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and

visited you?' 40. And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, **just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.**' (NRSV)

The NEW thing that is introduced in this story is incredibly important for all of those who want to survive the judgement. In no uncertain terms Jesus here provides us with the criteria for judgement and it is not what we expect. What we discover is that:

### **Our Attitude And Behaviour Towards The Household Of God Is The Criteria For Our Judgement**

Look at what he says that determines whether or not you are a sheep or a goat:

"Truly I tell you, **just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.**' (NRSV)

‘Your attitude and behaviour toward my family will determine your eternal destiny’.

And right away you want to shout out: ‘Hey! Captain Heresy, hold it just a second. A man is saved by faith alone! What you are saying is salvation by works!’ Well first of all, I’m not saying it, Jesus is saying it and I highly recommend against calling Jesus ‘Captain Heresy’ when next you meet him. And secondly, the Scriptures universally teach that faith is proved by one’s attitude and behaviour towards the family of Jesus.

James, the brother of Jesus says:

14. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15. **If a brother or sister** is naked and lacks daily food, 16. and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17. So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14-17. NRSV)

I’ve told you before that it is very important in the Bible to understand the difference between two terms: neighbours and brothers. People misinterpret these passages all the time by broadening them out further than Jesus intended. They will say: ‘Giving a cup of cold water to **anyone** in Jesus name is like doing it to Jesus.’ Not true. The water has to go to:

**one of the least of these who are members of my family.**' (NRSV)

You see, neighbours are **unbelievers in need**. Brothers and sisters are members of the household of God. They are fellow believers. James in this James 2 passage is referring to care for the brothers and sisters – for believers. How do I know that? Jesus said so.

33. And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34. And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35. Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:33-35. NRSV)

This is not guess work friends, this is explicit teaching. In Mark 3 Jesus is saying ‘I am creating a new family, the household of God, and it is made up exclusively of those who do the will of my Heavenly Father. It is a household of the saved.’ In this passage he is actually excluding his biological brothers and sisters because they had not yet come to faith. His actual brothers came to get him and Jesus said to the crowd: ‘These people are not my brothers. My brothers are the saved. You are my household.’

Just let all this sink in. Jesus is saying that your attitude and behaviour toward his household, the church, HIS BODY is received as your attitude and disposition towards him. You cannot say: ‘I love you Jesus, I just hate your brothers and sisters.’ NOT AN OPTION Jesus says. His best friend John said that too:

20. Those who say, "I love God," and **hate their brothers or sisters**, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21. The commandment we have from him is this: **those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also**. (1 John 4:20-21. NRSV)

The church, that is all true believers, is the BODY of Christ on earth. Hear that, let me say it slower: the church is the BODY of Christ on earth. We are Jesus. If you love us, you love Jesus. If you hate us, you hate Jesus. Now before you throw a heresy hand grenade at me, I didn't make this up. Jesus said:

16. "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." (Luke 10:16. NRSV)

If you reject the brothers and sisters of Jesus, you reject Jesus and that means you reject God and that makes Jesus very angry and Jesus is your Judge and that puts you in a very serious pickle. That's what the Bible teaches. Does that surprise you? I think this

teaching might be the most overlooked teaching in all of Christendom and we better not overlook it here. So in the time we have left we need to ask a very important question:

### **What Are The Implications Of This Teaching For Us As A Church?**

Does that interest you? It interests me a great deal.

#### **1. Compromising our community quality to increase our community attractiveness is a very dangerous game.**

It is a VERY dangerous game and we need to refuse to play it. Churches today that are afraid that the Gospel is less relevant, less powerful and less compelling than it was hundreds of years ago are beginning to change the nature of church. They are saying things that sound very wise: 'Its not about us, we need to reach out to culture, we need to compromise and build bridges, we need to speak their language, we need to stop being so selfish and we need to start reaching others.' Now, all of that sounds true, and all of that is true but it is the honey that is used to make us swallow a dangerous suicide pill. The suicide pill is that this, the gathering of the believers as the household of God, is not important. We don't need to be together as a body, we don't need to care for one another, we don't need to be holy, only the outsiders matter. Now we've crossed over into a dangerous place because Jesus said to love our neighbours, but he said our love for one another would be the proof of our faith. Again and again he said that:

35. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have **love for one another.**" (John 13:35. NRSV)

I was an associate pastor at a church once that fell into the ditch on this one. I remember we were all started feeling guilty for wanting to be fed and for wanting to be together as a group of believers. We used to celebrate communion very infrequently and it had to be on Sunday night. We couldn't do it on Sunday morning because that would make the outsiders feel left out. When we sang worship songs we couldn't sing the songs we wanted, the songs that transported our hearts into God's presence, we had to sing songs

for the outsiders. We had to sing songs they would recognise. We couldn't use any church language because that would make the visitors feel uncomfortable. We couldn't call it a bulletin because the outsiders wouldn't know what that is, we had to call it a program. I started wondering: 'How stupid are the people we are trying to reach?' And 'why did they come here if they hate everything about church?' 'Did they think that this was the movie theatre?' Pretty soon caring for one another became a sign of selfishness. Boy I tell you, as much as I'd like to punch the enemy in the face, you've got to admit he is one sly devil. He got us to turn the criteria for our own judgement into the vilest of sins and he did it all under the banner of evangelism. I'd like to give him a gold star and then cut his ugly head off. That's brilliant, but it has stolen eternal life from countless sons and daughters of the God I love.

Let me tell you something: YOU CAN LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOURS WHILE LOVING YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. There are 7 days in the week my friends and we only use one of them to love on each other and I will not give that up! When we come to the table to fellowship, we are going to love each other. We are going to serve each other. We are going to meet needs in this place. I'm going to put on the towel and bring you some water and some bread and even some meat, then you can do me. And we are going to speak TO EACH OTHER in this place; not to the people who may or may not be here looking over our shoulders. We are going to speak in our language and use some words that we value and treasure. Amen? Amen. This is my bulletin not my program and after the SERMON, not the talk mind you, the SERMON, we are going to sing WORSHIP SONGS not Beatles songs AMEN? Amen, hallelujah.

## **2. Hating the church is a ticket to hell.**

I realise that is offensive but it needs to be said. I hear people say all the time today: 'I love Jesus, but I hate the church.' 'I am a follower of Jesus but I am opposed to institutionalised religion.' Have you heard people say that? Let me ask you, if I said: "Bob I love you but I hate Sally, your wife", could Bob and I be friends? No chance. Bob would probably punch me in the face if I said that, and quite frankly I wouldn't

respect him if he didn't. I don't respect a man who would be friends with a man who spoke ill of his wife. Any of you who've played baseball with me know that if you want to see Pastor lose his cool just make a rude comment about my wife. We were playing church baseball once and some young punk from the other team made a disparaging gesture towards my wife and I just about lost my testimony. I repented before God but he didn't seem that concerned about it because God expects a man to love his wife and protect her honour does, he not? So let me ask you, how do you think Jesus feels when he hears you say that you hate his bride? The church is the BRIDE of Christ so how can you think that Jesus wants to be friends with you if you have nothing but bad things to say about his wife? Jesus' best friend John knew this, he knew that his friend Jesus would not be your friend if you hated any part of his wife:

15. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. (1 John 3:15. NRSV)

And by the way, where do you think John got this teaching? From Jesus maybe. Jesus said:

21. "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.' 22. But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:21-22. NRSV)

Jesus was referencing the section in the Old Testament where it talks about how murder must be punished very severely among God's people because his children are made in his image and every drop of their blood has to be accounted for. Numbers 35 says that anyone suspected of murder has to be brought before a national panel of judges so that tribal loyalty does not influence the verdict and it talks about how if a person is innocent they have to be protected by the Levites from family vengeance. But about the guilty it says this:

31. Moreover you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is subject to the death penalty; **a murderer must be put to death.** (Numbers 35:31. NRSV)

Some crimes you could pay your way out of with a fine. Not murder. A murderer has to be put to death. That's severe and now Jesus says that he loves his brothers and sisters so much that if you even HATE one of them, if you even SLANDER one of them you are going to hell. Maybe you think that Jesus will be impressed with your REASON for hating a brother? Maybe you think that if a REAL WRONG was done to you then you can hate a brother or slander a brother and get away with it? No. Jesus said that if you fail to forgive a brother you are going to hell. This teaching came out in conversation with Peter:

21. Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22. Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21-22. NRSV)

Peter struggled to receive this so Jesus told him a story that he ended this way:

in anger his lord **handed him over to be tortured** until he would pay his entire debt. 35. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart." (Matthew 18:34-35. NRSV)

Well you might say: 'Actually Pastor, it isn't a person, a part of the body that I hate, I hate the church as a whole'. Oh I see. Do you think that is any better? If I said to Bob: 'Bob it isn't Sally's personality I hate, its everything about her' the only real question is: does Bob punch me harder or softer?

Some have an even more delicate excuse, they are prepared to say, it isn't the Body of Believers I am opposed to it is the institutionalised form of it that I hate. Well now we are splitting hairs. I'm not sure that even Jesus will know what the heck you are talking about. What is the difference? That's like saying: 'Bob, its not Sally I hate its your WIFE Sally.' Unless Bob is a philosophy major he is still going to punch you in the face. And let's be very clear friends, God invented the institution of marriage and he invented the institution of the church so obviously God LOVES institutions. And on judgement day, you want to love what God loves and hates what God hates, Amen? Amen.

**3. We have to choose: cherish enmity or experience Presence.**

I've told you before my legendarily bad experience at the CBOQ headquarters when I was put on the Board of the denomination for a brief period of time. A heated discussion arose around same sex marriage and whether we had the right to mandate that our churches refuse to conduct the rite for same sex couples. I felt the leadership needed to tell people, stop quarrelling about this or get out of the denomination. We can't be sending nasty e-mails around and hijacking convention. The decision has been made, get on board or get out. The Executive Minister called a halt to the debate and picked up a chalice from the first Baptist Church ever in the country of Canada. He passed it around for all of us to see. He proudly read the name of that church: 'The First Church Of The Dissenters'. 'Dissent and disagreement have been a cherished part of our community since our forefathers set their feet on this hallowed soil back in 1746' or whenever it was. Are you kidding me? Maybe our forefathers were WRONG! The Bible says:

19. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20. idolatry, sorcery, **enmities, strife**, jealousy, anger, **quarrels, dissensions, factions**, 21. envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21. NRSV)

Seven of the things that can get you kicked out of the kingdom of God were practically enshrined in Baptist lore; one of them was engraved on a communion cup! Let me tell you something, if I have to choose between the council of our forefathers and the teaching of Scripture I will choose Scripture every time, I follow Jesus, not my Baptist forefathers.

Jesus says that anger and slander and DISSENSION within the household of God is the equivalent of murder, we saw that in the Matthew 5 passage. He uses the language of Numbers 35 to arrange his teaching. He mentions some attitudes and behaviours as types of murder: anger, slander and abuse and he hangs them on some with phrases from Numbers 35. People who do these things will be 'liable to judgement', 'liable to the council' and then finally he adds also they will be liable to the hell of fire. So he is very intentionally connecting these teachings and his disciples would not have missed it. Let's see how that Old Testament teaching about murder concludes:

a murderer must be put to death. (v.31) ... 33. You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; **for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites.** (Numbers 35:31-34. NRSV)

The reason that the people of God in the Old Testament had to take murder so seriously is because God wanted to dwell among them and he would have nothing to do with those who treated his children with violence. You see we love to talk about how God is our Redeemer don't we? There is a redeemer, Jesus God's own son... We love that! The redeemer is a concept from the Old Testament. Do you want to guess which passage? This one. Numbers 35. A redeemer or *go'el* had two major responsibilities. One, the one we like, was to buy his family members out of slavery. That's what we like about Jesus, he set the captives free. But a redeemer in Jewish culture had another role, he held the sword that executed the murderer. If a man was murdered, the council passed judgement on the offender and then the closest male relative of the murdered party had to wield the sword that took the murderer's life. That was the other job of the kinsman redeemer. You see, to love God as your redeemer means to understand that he kills all of those who murder, and Jesus adds, all of those who hate and slander his children. That's why they had to deal with murder so seriously in the Bible because God as Redeemer could not be in the same place as people who hurt his children or God would break out in vengeance and slay the people. If they tolerated murderers, God left in order that he not slay them. Jesus ends his story the same way:

23. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24. leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24. NRSV)

Jesus says, 'as you approach the Presence of God in worship, if you realise that you are in enmity, that you hate or are hated, that you have slandered, that you have withheld forgiveness against one of God's children – DO NOT PROCEED INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD or God as Redeemer will have no choice. He will have to withdraw lest he slay you as the redeemer of your brother's blood. The Bible in the Old Testament and the New Testament teaches the same thing: 'The Presence of God is nothing but DEATH for those who harbour murderers in their midst'. And in the New

Testament this teaching is intensified because now murder isn't just murder, its hate, strife, dissension, bitterness and unforgiveness. If we harbour people in our church who hate other Christians, or who harbour bitterness or who cause division or who will not forgive then we have made our choice. The Presence of God will flee. That's why the Bible says:

10. After a first and second admonition, **have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions**, 11. since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, **being self-condemned**. (Titus 3:10-11. NRSV)

As a leadership team we have decided to declare war on those who cause division and those who harbour bitterness and unforgiveness in this church. We do that not because we love people less than we used to, but rather because we desire God more than we used to. I don't want to come to church unless God is going to be here and if God isn't going to be here because we provide asylum to people who harbour bitterness and stir up division then we need to get that sorted out or this is all a waste of time.

### **Conclusion:**

The return of Jesus is going to be sudden and separating and the criteria will surprise many. May it not surprise anyone in this place. My prayer is that our love in this place for one another will grow and grow and grow. My prayer is that we will meet needs in this place. My prayer is that we will all WEAR THE TOWEL from the greatest to the least and we will serve one another. We will speak to one another – speak the TRUTH IN LOVE TO ONE ANOTHER, not veiling the truth as we talk to the people who look over our shoulders. We can still love our neighbours friends, but we will ultimately be much more attractive to them if we harbour in this place the Presence of the Living God. And all God's people said: Amen.