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Daily Devotional - Wednesday, June 26, 2024 - God's Presence in Serving Others

JUNE 26TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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What if you had a mirror that didn't just reflect your outward appearance, but could also reveal your inner self? The mirror would show how you interact with other people around you, particularly the least noticed and least cared for among us. This is like what Jesus does in Matthew 25:31–46, as He communicates a profound truth about recognizing His presence in those we meet as we go about our everyday lives.

Here, in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats (vv. 31–40), Jesus surveys all the people from all nations, separating them into two groups: sheep and goats (v. 31). One is given “eternal punishment” the other “eternal life” (v. 46). Jesus uses a unique method to tell one group from the other; and He identified with “the least of

these”—the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner (vv. 35–39). When we act in love to them, we encounter the living Lord Himself. By neglecting them, we turn our backs on Jesus and risk incurring future punishment.

I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

MATTHEW 25:40

Jesus calls us to be people of compassion. God's presence is not only found in expected places, for example where we regularly meet to worship with other believers, but also through our humble acts of kindness toward others. We are to cultivate a heart of compassion toward “the least of these” (v. 40) because when we do reach out to those in need around us, we are doing it as if the

recipient was Jesus Himself. The words of Jesus are both sobering and enlightening: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (v. 40). Jesus’ presence, then, is intricately intertwined with our actions and interactions with others, especially those on society’s margins.

Go Deeper

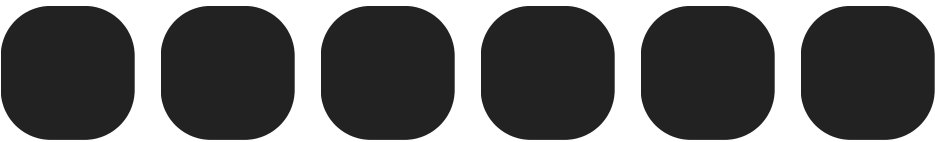
What was your reaction to the parable of the Sheep and the Goats? Which group better reflects your actions toward others? How can you cultivate a heart of compassion?

Pray with Us: Holy Spirit, teach us to recognize the presence of Jesus in others and be ready to help them. The parable of the Sheep and the Goats humbles us, as we see that Jesus identifies with “the least of these”—people we often avoid or neglect.

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Daily Devotional - Monday, June 24, 2024 - Eternity in His Presence

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Have you ever tried to put together a new piece of furniture without reading the instruction manual? At first it might seem self-explanatory, but there's nothing more troubling than to be left with several leftover pieces. Clearly, you needed more information.

In Matthew 22:23–33, Jesus confronts those who were misunderstanding something important. The Sadducees were a wealthy and powerful religious group. They believed

He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

MATTHEW 22:32

in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, and emphasized individual free will. They also did not believe in life after death, so their question to Jesus was dishonest. They questioned Jesus about marriage, hoping to trap Him (v. 23). Their question revealed that they did not fully comprehend what happened after death and what it would be like to be in God's presence for eternity. Jesus responded by affirming the reality of the resurrection and the eternality of God's presence. He corrected their misunderstanding: "He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (v. 32). The apostle Paul tackled this issue in 1 Corinthians: "How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (20:15).

The Sadducees needed guidance and clarity. God's presence is not limited to our earthly existence; it's eternal, encompassing both the now and the everlasting. His presence spans beyond our temporal understanding into an eternal reality. This knowledge should inspire awe, devotion, and joy in us and motivate us to dig deeper into His Word and seek to live more fully in His presence.

Jesus was critical of those who "do not know the scriptures or the power of God" (v. 29). It reminds us not to take lightly the privilege we have been given of reading and learning from God's Word.

Go Deeper

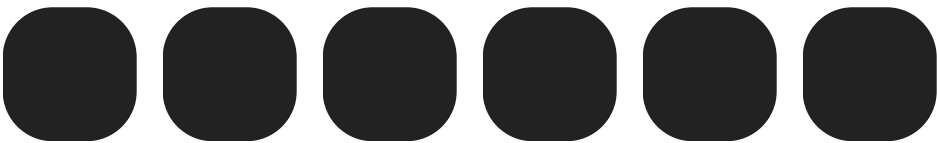
What did the Sadducees believe? Why were they wrong? What are some popular ideas about God and eternity in our culture that are antibiblical?

Pray with Us: Lord, it’s a joy to reflect on Your words, that You are the God of the living. You gave us new life in You and eternity in Your kingdom! This truth motivates us to dig deeper into Your life-giving Word.

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Daily Devotional - Friday, 21, 2024 - Living Like the Servant King

JUNE 21ST 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Friday, 21, 2024 - Living Like the Servant King

Imagine a corporate boss, who despite his high status, regularly takes the time to listen and to personally assist his employees no matter their role or status within the company. Certainly, that would be the type of boss any of us would want to work for! Humble leadership is a rare quality.

We have no greater example of humble leadership than Jesus. In Matthew 20, the mother of James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, asked for places of honor for her sons in His kingdom (vv. 20–21). Jesus responded: “You don’t know what you are asking” (v. 22).

Following and serving Jesus was not about prestige but about following His path of service and suffering.

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

MATTHEW 20:28

Jesus explained that in His kingdom true greatness would be found in serving others: “[W]hoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (v. 27). This echoes some of Matthew’s major themes: self-denial, status denial, servant-leadership, and Jesus’ mission.

Like the corporate boss who sets aside status to serve his team, Jesus— though He was God Himself—stepped into human history as a baby. He then served humanity by sacrificing His own life to offer eternal life. Jesus’ presence was marked by humility and service, not domination and control. Although He deserved all the glory, Jesus used His life to bring hope and justice to the marginalized. His presence brought healing, restoration, and dignity to the overlooked.

This is a counter-cultural perspective on greatness. In God’s kingdom, greatness is not about power, control, or status but about service and sacrificial love. Verse 28 gives a beautiful picture: “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Go Deeper

What are some ways we can serve as Jesus served? How can we humble ourselves, and in so doing, entice others to join in on the loving and transformative presence of God?

Pray with Us: You are the Almighty King, and yet You said You came to serve. In our world that glorifies power, these are shocking words! Lord God, examine our hearts today and help us follow Your example of a humble Servant.

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Daily Devotional - Wednesday, June 19, 2024 - GOD'S PRESENCE IN RESTORATION

JUNE 19TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional - Wednesday, June 19, 2024 - GOD'S PRESENCE IN RESTORATION

A symphonic band is comprised of musicians playing many types of instruments. There is the woodwind section with clarinets and saxophones. A brass section features trumpets and trombones. Joining them are stringed instruments—violin and cello. Each produces a unique sound. But when the musicians play together, guided by their conductor, they produce harmonious and beautiful music.

Matthew 18:15–20 stresses the importance of believers living together in beautiful harmony, but there is a powerful force that can make this work—the presence of our Lord Himself! “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (v. 20).

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

MATTHEW 18:20

Many have associated this verse with people gathering for prayer. And while prayer in groups is certainly a good thing, the central focus of this passage is about the process of restoring erring believers (v. 15). Jesus clearly wants His disciples to know that if we as believers go about the tough task of restoring others in the name of Jesus (v. 20) within the church, He will be right there in their midst helping to bring that to pass.

The goal here is reconciliation, not condemnation. We are called to resolve conflicts with grace and love, striving to maintain unity among believers. God is in the business of restoration, that is why Jesus promises His very presence to assist believers in that difficult process. As we reflect on this passage, let's remember the words of Psalm 133:1: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Let us strive for creating space for our Lord's presence to move among us and restore those who are straying away. As we gather in His name, we can be confident that our Lord is guiding and blessing us with His divine presence.

Go Deeper

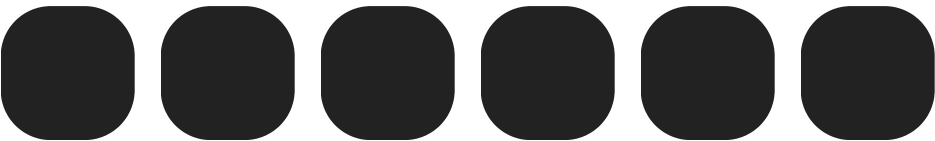
What guidelines do we find in Matthew 18 for biblical confrontation among believers? How can we make sure that God is present in these difficult conversations?

Pray with Us: Lord, Your promise to be with us in a special way when we gather together prompts us to strive for unity, reconciliation, grace, and love in our churches. Restore those who have strayed! Bring them back, we pray.

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Daily Devotional - Sunday, June 16, 2024

Daily Devotional - Sunday, June 16, 2024

Sometimes we act like following Jesus requires building an impressive religious resume. We make sure our calendar is packed with plenty of to-do items for Jesus. How many church committees have we served on? How many times have we read through the Bible? Do we have perfect attendance at church services? Do we look the part of a perfect Christian?

Matthew 15 contains a conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees about tradition and purity. The Pharisees were accusing Jesus' disciples of breaking tradition by not washing their hands before

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

MATTHEW 15:8

eating (v. 2). Jesus highlighted the Pharisees' hypocrisy, emphasizing that it's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of it (v. 11). Jesus was redirecting their focus from external rituals to their heart's condition. He declared that what defiles a person comes from the heart and is not caused by what a person consumes.

Jesus listed several unclean things that come out of our mouths that actually come from our hearts. From our hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, and slander (vv. 18–19). The mouth simply reveals what has been in our hearts all along.

What lesson can we learn? It is critical to prioritize the state of our hearts over the performance of religious duties. Jesus said, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (v. 8). God's presence is not dependent on our outward practices but on our inward commitment and love for Him. He desires hearts that are devoted to Him more than merely complying with tradition. It is critical to do some internal "housecleaning" to discover, through confession and repentance, what evil lurks in our hearts.

Go Deeper

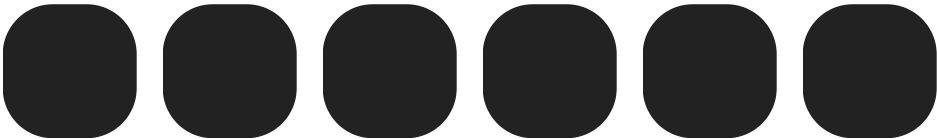
How are we sometimes like the Pharisees? What behaviors do we consider unclean and clean today? Do we sometimes prioritize the performance of religious duties over the state of our hearts?

Pray with Us: How do we get rid of hypocrisy? Jesus, we confess we often resemble the Pharisees when we honor You with our lips, but our hearts are hardened. Draw us by Your Spirit to love You with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

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