**Who We Are: Helping the Hurting**

**Text: Matthew 25:31-46**

**Big Idea:  Helping the hurting has eternal impact.**

**Ice Breaker:**  If you were going to be on a reality TV show, what would it be?

This past Sunday we picked up our series, “Who We Are.” We discussed our value, “Help the hurting,” which states, “ *We have a heart to help the hurting, and in doing so we serve Christ.”*We looked at how the first churches in Scripture had deacons to help the hurting and we commissioned our first deacons to do the same. Tonight, we will look at a foundational passage for this value which shows us more about who the hurting are in scripture and what we personally can do to help them.

**(1)  When Jesus returns, he will separate all people one by one.**

*Matthew 25:31-45  "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.  (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.*

**Q: Most people believe Jesus is talking about his return in this passage. What are some of the important features we see him mention about his return here?**

***[LEADER -- glory, angels, throne, judgment, gathering of nations]***

**Q:  Jesus says that all the NATIONS will be gathered -- but that God will separate the people as INDIVIDUALS, not nations.  Do you see any significance in that?**

**[*LEADER -- This is an important point. It matters, as we will see, what we do individually to help the hurting.]***

**Q:  Think about the symbolism being used.  Why are sheep used for the good guys, and goats for the bad guys?**

**[*LEADER -- See study notes]***

**(2) He will separate people based on how they helped the hurting.**

*Matthew 25:34-40 (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, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

**Q:  People will be separated according to what they DO?  What about being saved by FAITH -- where does THAT come in?**

***[LEADER -- Part of faith in God is desire to do what he would have you do.  This story shows the part of faith that lives out what you say you believe.  This judgment could be said to be based on “how you show who you love”.]***

**Q:  The ones who are accepted and rewarded seem to be surprised by it.  Why might that be?**

***[LEADER -- It might be because the righteous are humble enough to be very aware that their efforts are tiny compared to what COULD be done, and that they are, after all, only doing what ought to be done, and so aren’t expecting any great reward.]***

**Q:  In what way does serving people in need actually minister to Jesus himself?**

**Q: Our value of helping the hurting is rooted in this passage. What do “least of these” have in common in this passage?**

***Another way to say it, “How are these people all hurting?”***

***[Leader --  The least of these were in hurting situations. The hurting in this passage are in situations in which they can’t help themselves. ]***

**(3) If you fail to help the hurting, you miss the chance to love Jesus and show the love of Jesus.**

*Matthew 25:41-46  (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, 'Truly I tell you, 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."*

**Q:  The ones who are rejected and condemned seem to be surprised by it.  Why might that be?**

***[LEADER -- two common characteristics of the one who rejects God are: a) a proud spirit that thinks it’s good enough just the way it is, thank you very much; and b) a sense that no one has the right to judge them anyway.  This combination of attitudes makes it shocking to them that they could be considered to be anything less than just what they ought to be.***

**Q:  Why is our treatment of those who are in all kinds of need so important that it brings eternal consequences?**

**Q:  If we really took this story seriously, what would change in how we live and think?**

**NEXT STEPS:**  Help the hurting

**1) Serve at the Food Pantry** - commit to serving at your group's next time at the pantry.

**2) Serve in the Care Ministry** - contact Jay Cook at jay@pointchurch.com for ways to help the hurting throughout the week in our church and community.

***FURTHER STUDY NOTES***

***Vs. 32*** [Jon Courson] Years ago, I sat on a hill outside Galilee and watched a single shepherd boy lead a flock of sheep. It was a beautiful sight. Goats, on the other hand, are impossible to lead. They would rather butt heads and eat trash than follow anyone. Goats do what they want. I know those of us who have embraced Jesus Christ as Lord are all sheep, but I fear sometimes there's too much goat in me. May we be like sheep who travel as a flock following the Lord's leading.

[Intervarsity Press Bible Background Commentary] Although sheep and goats grazed together, it is said that Palestinian shepherds normally separated sheep and goats at night because goats need to be warm at night while sheep prefer open air. Sheep were more valuable than goats, and characteristics like this may have may have influenced how these terms would be heard figuratively; for instance, in a pagan dream handbook sheep were associated with good while goats were associated with trouble.

***Vs. 34-40*** [Dan Fortner] of God in Christ. Our works have nothing to do with our everlasting acceptance with God. When God opens the books on that day, he will bring us into heaven because no sin is recorded against us; but only righteousness, perfect righteousness is recorded under our names in heaven.

However, God will in that day demonstrate that grace made his elect to be truly new creatures in Christ. Their works, which follow them into heaven, shall be witness brought forward by God himself, as to why they should be admitted into his heavenly kingdom. Above all else, their works of charity, kindness, and hospitality shall beheld forth as evidences of their faith.

· Our faith is proven to be either false or true by our lives.

· Faith without works is dead (James 2:11-14).

· And the great test of godliness is love. He that loveth not knoweth not God!”

[Ray Stedman] The arresting thing about this is that Jesus is clearly saying that the ultimate mark of an authentic Christian is not his creed, or his faith, or his Bible knowledge, but the concern which he shows to those who are in need. The practical demonstration of love is the final proof. And note also that Jesus does not ask anyone to present his case or argue his cause. He asks no questions nor requests any evidence. He simply extends to this one group the invitation, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom." Then he explains the basis of his choice. He has simply noted that when they had opportunity to help someone in need, they did it. Nothing more is required. It is sobering to realize that Jesus identifies himself with those in need. If you help them, he says, you are really helping me; and if you ignore them you are ignoring me.

***Vs. 45*** [Albert Barnes] By not doing good to the “followers” of Christ, they showed that they had no real love to Him. By not doing good to the poor and needy, to the stranger and the prisoner, they showed that they had not his spirit, and were not like him, and were unfit for his kingdom. Let it be observed here that the public ground of their condemnation is the neglect of duty, or because “they did it not.” We are not to suppose that they will not also be condemned for their open and positive sins. But their neglect of doing good to him and his people may be the “public” reason of condemning them:

1. Because he wished to give pre-eminence to those virtues, to excite his followers to do them.

2. People should be punished for neglect as well as for positive sin. Sin is a violation of the law, or refusing to do what God commands.

3. Nothing better shows the true state of the heart than the proper performance of those duties, and the true character can be as well tested by neglecting them as by open crimes.