

ONLY CARING PEOPLE INHERIT THE KINGDOM

Do Care! It matters!

Matt 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'



Manny lives in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. He is married and has five children. He does not have work. His wife washes clothes of the rich and comes to the house twice a month, so Manny has to take care of the children. However, the money she brings is not enough. Therefore, Manny is thinking of selling his kidney. He was promised 11,000 Pesos (250 USD). It is a lot of money for his family. Does he need to do that?

The Parable

This is one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke. It is the third among those, which speak about the final judgement. We have heard about the wise and unwise virgins (Matt 25:1-12), the two good and one bad servants (Matt 25:14-30), and today we hear about people being divided into two groups: the merciful and the indifferent ones. Like the previous parables, many will not be happy with its message. The world praises achievers, people who claim to be successful by worldly standards. In religious circles, we admire those who possess special gifts of miraculous powers, healing and those who are gifted in preaching electrifying sermons. Yet, the king

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"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For 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 welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, saying, '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, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

does not care about such things. He has only one measurement: his judgement is based on our reaction to human needs.

The consequences are far-reaching. We are not asked about our bank accounts, education, religious dogmas and church affiliation. Holy vows and promises of celibacy are not counted as a plus in applying for heavenly citizenship. This king does not ask any questions and does not accept excuses, but he knows the history of our lives. Moreover, he walks the streets of this world hidden among the poor, the needy, and the broken.

Another surprising aspect of this parable is the reaction of those being judged. Those on the right took it for granted that they could do otherwise. "It should be done. What's the fuss?" There was no hidden agenda in their acts of mercy. They did not do it in order to get the entry ticket to heaven. They did it, because they saw the need of another person. Those on the left, on the other hand, are surprised that they get punished for overlooking the needs of others. Why should omission and indifference throw them into hell? Ellie Wiesel powerfully answered this question: "for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbour are of no consequence. . . . their lives are meaningless. Their

hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the Other to an abstraction".

Charity - Our Chance

The best interpretation of this parable is given by the apostle Paul: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13:1-3). The Greek word "agape", "love", or "charity", means un-calculated, selfless love.

Our world is a very strange place. There are people who earn millions of dollars a year, and there are those who barely earn a dollar a day. Some get sick and die because they eat too much and others because they do not eat enough. The powerful of this world convoke

meeting after meeting in order to solve the problems, but the results are not really encouraging. Why? Because, greed has corrupted our hearts. The world built on greed, indifference, and selfishness is unsustainable. A world without charity turns itself into hell.

The parable invites us to rethink our priorities. To get to heaven, we do not need diplomas, wallets filled with credit cards, or high social status. The only thing we need is a heart that feels the pain of others and stimulates us to action. When Francis of Assisi saw a leper he embraced him. When mother Teresa saw the dire conditions of people living on the streets of Calcutta, she left her congregation and began to live and work among them. When his wife got sick, John decided to take leave to be by her side. When his daughter got into trouble at school, Jim gave up his American dream and walked with her through her crisis of life. The parable tells us that the winner is not the one who dies with the most toys, but the one who dedicates his time to others. This is the fairest way to judge the world. All of us are capable of caring for others. Paul says: "Carry one another's burdens and in such a way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:5).

Conclusion

I do not know what happened to Manny. Perhaps, he was lucky to avoid the operation and find a job as a cleaner in a large department store with a decent salary. Perhaps, he was ripped off and his kidney extended someone else's life. Whatever happened, Manny is going to be placed on the right side of the king, because of his selfless love for his family, but those hunting for human organs and preying on human misery will end on the left.

Certain parables do not require explanation, but they require action. The parable of the Final Judgment is one among them. Jesus told us this parable to shake our indifferent conscience. It is not easy to get involved in other person's misery, yet it is the only way to inherit the kingdom that God has prepared for us since the foundation of the world.

May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.

New Life Asia Team