

You are to be commended, as a group, for your social endeavors. You are fulfilling what God considers to be of prime importance. Let me share a story with you from

Matt. 25:14-46

THE STORY ABOUT INVESTMENT

God's Kingdom is like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his masters' money.

After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: "Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner."

The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: "Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner."

The servant given one thousand said, "Master I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent."

The master was furious. "That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.

Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this 'play-it-safe' who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness."

THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out the sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, "Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me."

The "sheep" are going to say, "Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?" Then the King will say, "I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me."

Then he will turn to the "goats," the ones on his left, and say, "Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because –

I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,

Sick and in prison, and you never visited.”

Then those “goats” are going to say, “Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn’t help?

He will answer them, “I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me – you failed to do it to me.”

Then those “goats” will be herded to their eternal doom, but the “sheep” to their eternal reward.

Too many churches and denominations are content to remain complacently on their padded pews, receiving their weekly blessing but not applying their faith to the real world. Listen to what God says about that.

Amos 5:21-24

I can’t stand your religious meetings. I’m fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I’ve had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to *me*? Do you know what I want? I want justice – oceans of it. I want fairness – rivers of it. That’s what I want. That’s *all* I want.

A good question is asked in Micah chapter 6

Micah 6:6-8

How can I stand up before God and show proper respect to the high God? Should I bring an armload of offerings topped off with yearling calves? Would God be impressed with thousands of rams, with buckets and barrels of olive oil? Would he be moved if I sacrificed by firstborn child, my precious baby, to cancel my sin?

But he’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It’s quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don’t take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.

2 Cor. 5:10-12 Tells us that...

Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that’s what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions. Sooner or later we’ll all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ and take what’s coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad.

That keeps us vigilant, you can be sure. It’s no light thing to know that we’ll all one day stand in that place of Judgment. That’s why we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God.

Heb. 9:27 confirms that...

Everyone has to die once, then face the consequences...

You see, when we stand before God’s court of justice we won’t be worried about what our Christian neighbor has done. Each person is accountable to Christ, not to others. The Bible teaches individual accountability; that there will be no excuses when we stand before God. We will appear alone before God.

Rom. 14:12

Eventually we’re all going to end up kneeling in the place of judgment, facing God. Critical and condescending ways aren’t going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture: “As I live and breathe,” God says, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will tell the honest truth that I and only I am God.”

Again, I commend you for the great works of charity that you perform. I merely ask you to consider the other side of God's will. You need to understand that your works alone are not going to be sufficient to get you to heaven.

In our church we like to speak about what I refer to as the "Middle Way." On one hand you have people who believe that if they just call themselves Christians, attend church and sing hymns that that will be sufficient for God. On the other hand you have those who somehow have gotten the misconception that if they can just do enough good works, if their good works somehow outweigh their bad works that that will be sufficient for entrance into heaven. Both are wrong. It requires faith in Christ's finished work, but it must be faith that results in a changed life. After all, Paul tells us

Eph. 2:2-11

You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with and incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in the highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Let us be about our heavenly Father's business. Let us free those who are unjustly imprisoned. Let us feed the hungry. Let us heal the sick. Let us care for the fatherless, the widow, the weak and downtrodden. But let us also make sure that God is in fact our heavenly Father. May we follow the Middle Way.