“Salvation Too”

November 22, 2026 First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Matthew 25:31-46

A couple weeks ago we talked about the Romans Road to salvation and the ABC’s of becoming a Christian. Those revolved around recognizing you were not doing things God’s way, asking for forgiveness through Jesus, and choosing to follow God and to do your best to do things God’s way moving forward. That moment moves a person from following how they feel, or how they think, or how they were brought up, or society or natural desires; and accept Jesus as their Savior and boss, and say I am going to follow Him. That moment that we change from listening to those other things and start listening to Jesus is the moment we become a Christian – it is the wedding. But we also affirmed that Christianity is not just a moment, but a lifetime – a lifetime of following through on that moment, a lifetime of listening to and following Jesus – the marriage. A moment to become a Christian. A lifetime to be a Christian.

Well, this morning’s passage is a check-in to see how that journey of following God’s way is going. Jesus is speaking and He is crafting His message with the subtlety of a sledgehammer. The directness of the passage says if you think you are following God’s way but are not caring for the most vulnerable among us – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner – if you are not caring for the most vulnerable among us, well, you’re wrong – you are not a Christian. You are not following God’s will. And the King who judges between the sheep and the goats says you are going to “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” But if you share food with the vulnerable, if you make sure they have clean water to drink and clothes to wear, if you help provide medical care and make sure the prisoner is not forgotten; in verse 34 Jesus says, “Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” and “inherit eternal life”. Like I said, it is a message crafted with the subtlety of a sledgehammer. If you want to know if you are following God’s will as opposed to listening to the voices of your own selfishness, natural desires, or societal norms; bang, look at your finances, look at where you spend your time, examine your thought patterns. If you are helping to take care of the physical and emotional needs of your neighbor, you are welcomed into heaven. If you aren’t, bang, burn. Reality check from Jesus. Maybe that banging is not from a sledgehammer, but a gavel?

Well, Pastor Mike, let me get this straight. According to this passage, if I, or someone else, helps provide for the needs of the vulnerable, that punches our ticket to heaven? Why didn’t you tell us this sooner. I can do that. I am comfortable asking and even helping my family and friends gather their gently used clothes and things they don’t use anymore and donate them. I am way more comfortable talking to them about that than talking to them about Jesus. I would much rather organize a canned food drive at work than risk inviting those I work with to church.

And if they bring in a canned good to feed someone who was hungry or bring in clothes to help clothe someone in need, they are on the sheep side and going to heaven. That is way easier than drawing those two cliffs with the cross bridge and following it up with the ABCs of salvation. Get them to share a can of SpaghettiOs, or better yet, tell them you want your birthday gift to be a donation to United Ministries, or Week of Compassion or Heifer International, and when they give it, they are in. And because it was donated in my name, I am in. Mike, you should have started with this instead of all that admit you are a sinner in need of forgiveness. Buying extra SpaghettiOs is way easier.

Welcome to the dangers of proof texting. Proof texting is when you use a specific passage or verse from Scripture, pull it out of its context, and use it to prove a particular belief or doctrine. As Biblestudy.org says, quote "The problem with this method is that the person who is Proof texting usually gives their selected verses a meaning that may be entirely different from what the writer intended. The Bible is written in such a way that most verses cannot be correctly understood in a stand-alone fashion. The context of a particular verse, who wrote it, the time period in which it was written, where did they write it, etc. is needed to arrive at what God intended it to convey." Unquote. Let me give you an example. If you pull out this passage from Matthew and just look at it, you could proclaim our salvation is entirely defined by caring for the poor. When we care for the least of these among us, we earn our way to heaven. Of course, if you say that, you are ignoring the wealth of passages that proclaim we cannot earn our way to heaven, and it makes Jesus' life, death and resurrection irrelevant. Simply not needed. Instead of relying on God's grace, brought to us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, all you have to do is give a thirsty person something to drink and hungry person something to eat. A hint here: if Christ is not needed to be a Christian, that might give you a clue that your definition is missing something. Being nice to folks who are down and out is good, but it is an incomplete plan of salvation for it negates the role of belief, which God counts to us as righteousness. You miss the A – admit and B – believe in the ABCs of faith. Being kind is not enough. Of course, on the other hand, if you just go with the A – admit, admit you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, B – believe, believe Jesus is the Son of God and died for your sins, and even C – confess, confess your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord; but then don't feed those who are hungry, provide clean water for the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoner – you are proof texting. You are taking one part of the Bible over another part. It is a yes/and, not an either/or. The great commandment says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" – the ABCs of salvation – "and love your neighbor as yourself" – care for the least of these among us. They are both right there in the great commandment. How you become a Christian and how you live out your Christianity. Both are essential.

But I don't just want to warn against proof texting today. I want you to see the beauty that is standing at the right hand of God. The thing that jumped out at me in my research this week is

nobody saw Jesus in the face of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger in town, the naked, the sick or the prisoner. The righteous are not commended for recognizing Jesus in the poor, the hungry, the prisoners. They didn't. They just treated every single person they met with love. That is something quite remarkable. In a world that tries to categorize people, and then judge them by their category, these people who sat at the right hand of Jesus loved every single one. Regardless of political persuasion, national origin, or history; regardless of what they were wearing, what language they were using, or what part of the world they were from; regardless of if they were accused of a crime, lost their job, or were even defined as the enemy; these people engaged them, listened to them, and found a way to serve them. It is quite remarkable how some people can be so consistently looking for ways to lift others up, it becomes their autopilot, their default setting, their reflex. We know some people whose autopilot is set on suspicion, others fear, others opportunity to get ahead, others conflict, others avoiding conflict, others just not wanting to be noticed. Yet those who have turned away from the voices of this world, asked Jesus to forgive them, and strive to follow God's way in this world, who are now invited to "inherit the kingdom prepared for (them) from the foundation of the world"; their desire to help and serve is so deep in their psyche, it is a reflex. That is a beautiful picture of one who has been saved by grace and has given their life to following Jesus.

Mike Van Heyningen