



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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THAT Was Jesus?!

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

AT THE SHEEP AND GOAT judgment in Matthew 25, the King divides them, welcoming the sheep to inherit the kingdom while telling the goats on His left, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:32-41). Jesus tells both groups that the division is based on their service to Him; but their service is different from how we usually think. It’s so radically different that both groups question it.

Jesus tells the righteous that the reason for their entrance to His Father’s eternal kingdom is, “for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (25:35-36). The righteous respond by asking when they did these things for Him, and the King answers, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (25:37-40).

Then Jesus tells those on His left hand, “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 take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me” (25:42). The goats wonder, “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, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (25:44-45).

When is the last time we saw someone who was hungry and thought about Jesus? Did we actually think, “If that were Jesus, would I feed him/her?” What if at the judgment Jesus says, “That was me!” Giving someone a drink of water is so inexpensive in our culture that we don’t value it enough to think to offer it. But at the judgment,

Jesus may say that the thirsty person we ignored and could have helped was Him (see also Matt. 10:42).

How do we feel about strangers? The Greek word here is literally “foreigners” or “aliens.” We need to do a serious examination of our thoughts and actions towards strangers. There are many immigrants who are currently suffering in our country. At the judgment, we will hear the King say, “You took me in” or “You did not take Me in.” The same is true of clothing the naked and visiting the sick and imprisoned (25:42-44).

The problem is that when we see an unkempt homeless person, an immigrant who doesn’t speak English, or someone in prison, we feel sure they aren’t Jesus. Jesus wouldn’t be in the situations *they* are in, right? Well, Jesus was hungry (Matt. 4:2; 21:18). Jesus was thirsty (Jn 4:6-7; 19:28). He was a foreigner in a strange land (Matt. 2:13-15). Jesus was arrested and stripped naked (Jn 19:23; 18:12-13). We think we would have jumped right in to help Jesus with acts of compassion and service; but Jesus is saying that if we aren’t doing it now for others, we wouldn’t have helped Him back then. He’s actually saying that if we aren’t doing it now for others—even for the “least,” undeserving people—we aren’t doing it to Him now!

This teaching shouldn’t feel radical to us. Remember what Jesus said: “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the



first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:28-31). People we know and don’t know, people who are like us and not like us, are all our neighbors. People who are good or bad, legal or illegal, documented or undocumented, are still our neighbors. People who are employed or unemployed, rich or poor, are our neighbors. Jesus says we should love them. We aren’t allowed to hate them, abuse them, or support those who do. Love them, and you love Jesus. Do good to them, and you do good to Him.

Righteous disciples (sheep) will see Jesus as the motivation to love and serve others. The unrighteous (goats) will not see Jesus in people who are undeserving and vulnerable. Where followers of Jesus see opportunities to express love, compassion, help, and service, the unrighteous will only see liabilities, waste, and threats. In the words of Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all...”

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

~MATTHEW 10:42

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“The True North Strong and Still Free”

By JEREMY DIESTELKAMP

I HAVE PREACHED for the East End church in Toronto, Canada, for eleven years and have preached on and off for an additional twelve years. The work in Canada, as in many places, has its challenges due to increased secularization and a general turn away from religion; but the work here is also very rewarding. The congregation in Toronto has almost doubled in size in the past five years due in large part to legal immigration and the hard work we have done evangelizing in the community. Our YouTube channel is watched by people around the world. We certainly will not compete with the many denominational channels out there, but having almost 5,000 subscribers is not insignificant. This internet presence, along with numerous private classes being held throughout the week, makes us optimistic about the furtherance of the Gospel here in Canada.

However, in spite of all of this, over the past year I have had to field questions from concerned brethren in America about the level of government persecution against those who preach the Gospel and worship in Canada. Knowing that there might be some confusion, I thought that I would try to allay some of these concerns.

To begin with, Canada is still a free and democratic society whose government is elected every two to four years in fair elections run by a non-partisan, arm's length, election board. Neither side of the political aisle has accused the other of cheating; and, although not everybody always likes the election results, very few complain about the electoral process.

Next, neither the federal nor the provincial governments actively persecute churches or religious organizations for what they teach and preach. There is a human rights tribunal in Canada that does hear cases about hate speech; but churches are not being dragged before these tribunals for teaching against abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, or any other issue. An exception to this might be if someone is actively calling for the harm of someone else, but I have not heard of many churches doing this. I can and do preach on any biblical topic I choose without fear of being arrested, killed, or censored; and we live-stream these lessons online without any negative feedback from the government. During the pandemic, you might have heard of a preacher or a church that faced repercussions for failing to adhere to government mandates surrounding masks and meeting size, but these enforcement actions were taken against both churches and secular

organizations that violated these mandates. The government up here was strict about the rules, but the rules were applied fairly. The government didn't single out churches for enforcement. When the government did overstep, our courts reined in those edicts, ruling on the side of religious freedom to worship, albeit with temporary and reasonable restrictions for health and safety in place.

Finally, even though our society in Canada is socially liberal and secular, groups can and do engage publicly in evangelism. You can still find people on the street corners trying to teach people about Jesus. We still hand out material door to door and talk to people about the Gospel as we do so. In spite of some people's misgivings, many are still willing to discuss religion. It is rare that someone would face overt persecution for merely talking about Jesus. Are there instances of hate and violence? Yes, but this is true in every country. Satan is actively trying to suppress the teaching of the Gospel and will use any way he can to tempt people to stand up against its teaching. But here in Canada, we still can and do freely spread the good news about Jesus.

Even if none of this were true and Canada was a dangerous place to teach the Gospel, the Gospel would still need to be preached in Canada. Paul told the Thessalonians: *"Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know"* (1 Thess. 3:1-4). Paul would later tell Timothy: *"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra — what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (2 Tim. 3:10-12).

Fear of persecution should never be an excuse to not spread the Gospel or to not send preachers to spread the Gospel. Persecution should be seen as an opportunity to go out and teach all the more. Might precautions need to be taken? Sure! But Paul stood in the Areopagus and preached the Gospel. He stood before Felix and preached the Gospel. He stood before Festus and preached the Gospel. And he stood before Agrippa and preached the Gospel.

This preaching was not before friendly audiences. Paul could have easily been harmed for preaching Jesus, but Paul did it anyway, for his attitude was: *"...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"* (1 Cor. 9:16). This should be our attitude, too, no matter where we are.

Canada is a beautiful country to visit, but it needs men to move here to preach the pure message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There are two congregations in Ontario that lack preachers as of this writing: one on the other side of Toronto and one about 90 minutes away in Peterborough. Both are good groups of Christians, and both would be profitable works. There are also many major cities in Canada without faithful churches in them. If you would like more information about this or would like to inquire about working with the congregations up here that need preachers, email me. I would be more than happy to talk with you. *"...The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest"* (Matt. 9:37).

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Global Perspective

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

JESUS' INSTRUCTIONS to His apostles to "make disciples of all the nations" (Mt. 28:19) and be His witnesses "to the end of the earth" (Ac. 1:8) provides His followers with a global perspective that should temper our earthly connections and loyalties. Jesus' kingdom, of which we all desire to be a part, is not defined or defended by geopolitical methods. Therefore, we are not Americans (or Canadians or any other nationalistic identities) who happen to be Christians. We are Christians sojourning in the various countries of this world. This is the perspective that all followers of Christ must have regardless of where we were born or live in this world.

Do not confuse this global perspective of God's kingdom with secular globalism that sees value in a fleshly, one-world government. The latter is of men and should be shunned just as Babel of old (Gen. 11:1-9). However, spiritual globalism views Jesus as king over a domain that will stand even as the nations fall. Let us confess that we are sojourners desiring and seeking a heavenly homeland and act accordingly (cf. Heb. 11:13-16).

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DON'T MARRY A CANAANITE

By NATHAN COMBS

GOD CARES DEEPLY about whom His people marry. When Abraham commissioned his oldest household servant to find a mate for Isaac, he made him swear that he would not get a woman from the daughters of the Canaanites (Gen. 24:3). God then blessed the servant's search and led him straight to Rebekah. The next generation broke family precedent, however. "When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite" (26:34). These family additions were not a blessing, for "they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah" (26:35).

This bitterness did not dissipate. In the only recorded conversation between Rebekah and Isaac, the distressed matriarch told her husband: "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?" (27:45-46). As Jacob prepared to flee from his brother's murderous anger, Isaac reiterated Abraham's firm instructions: "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women" (28:6). After Jacob left for Paddan-aram to marry into Laban's family, Esau took a third woman (this time from Ishmael's family) because he "saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father" (28:8-9).

Jacob's burgeoning family eventually moved back to the promised land, where his daughter Dinah attracted the attention of Shechem, a local Hivite lord. In the manner of a worldly prince, Shechem lay with her and enthusiastically negotiated with Jacob's family to marry her. The family patriarch was silent and passive (34:5), but Jacob's sons were vocal and outraged (31:7, 31). From the Hivite perspective, Dinah and Shechem's union would lead to more marriage alliances and the eventual absorption of Abraham's family (and their possessions) into their community (34:9-10, 21-23). Simeon and Levi, however, put a violent end to this Canaanite plan by butchering the males of the city (34:25-29). In doing so, they inadvertently foreshadowed God's eventual plan for all the people of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7).

Unfortunately, that event was not the end of Canaanite contamination. Judah, Jacob's fourth-born (and ancestor of the Lord) chose the path of his uncle Esau. He "saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her" (38:2), echoing Eve's choice when she saw the fruit and took it (3:6). Judah's decision was disastrous. He fathered three

He who finds a wife
finds a good thing
and obtains favor from the LORD

~PROVERBS 18:22

sons by Shua, but two of them were executed by God because of their wickedness. After Judah's wife died, he lustfully pursued a supposed cult prostitute, but she turned out to be his daughter-in-law—a probable Canaanite herself (38:1-30). Judah was not the only brother affected by the lure of local women: in a list of Jacob's descendants, we are told that Simeon's son, Shaul, was "the son of a Canaanite woman" (46:10, repeated in Ex. 6:15). This unnamed woman is especially noteworthy because she is one of only two mothers of that generation mentioned in the entire list (interestingly, the other is Asenath, the Egyptian wife of Joseph and daughter of an idolatrous priest).

What was the purpose of this persistent thread in Genesis? Why were Canaanite-Israelite relationships cast in a negative light? The first hearers of Genesis (the Exodus generation) needed to understand the necessity of religious purity in the family. They had just left a culture of idolaters (in Egypt) and were heading for a land occupied by idolaters (in Canaan). Therefore, with the stories of their ancestors laid as historical foundation, God issued clear instructions as they prepared to enter the promised land. "You shall not intermarry with them [the seven Canaanite nations], giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods" (Deut. 7:3-4).

Abraham was chosen to "command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19), and this task depended on each generation marrying God-fearing individuals who helped, rather than hindered, the plan. Israelite families who ignored Deuteronomy faced dire spiritual consequences. Think of Ahab and his Sidonian queen (1 Kgs. 16-19). Think of Solomon, whose heart eventually turned to idols because he clung to idolatrous women (1 Kgs. 11:1-4). Think of the Jews who intermarried during Ezra and Nehemiah's time, families in which half the children could not even speak the language of God's law (Neh. 13:23-27).

These examples were "written down for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11) and their application is clear. In light of these narra-

tives, should a disciple think "I can always convert him/her later"? Isn't it just as likely that your spouse will convert you to the world or shift your beliefs to a perverted form of the gospel? Do not underestimate the powerful influence wielded by those we love. While soft-hearted outsiders like Rahab and Ruth were rightly welcomed into God's family, the weight of the Hebrew scriptures strongly warns against marrying unrepentant foreigners.

In the New Testament, it is taken for granted that disciples of Jesus will only marry other disciples. Paul hypothetically asks the Corinthian church: "Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife...?" (1 Cor. 9:5). When counseling widows earlier in the letter, Paul writes that "if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, *only in the Lord*" (1 Cor. 7:39). Clearly, marriage to a disciple was not a special standard for only apostles and gospel ministers.

Marriage is one of the closest (and strongest) partnerships that humans can form. We must not enter it with unresolved differences on foundational questions such as "What is the purpose of our new family?" or "How does someone become Jesus' disciple?" or "What kind of local church will we work with?" Although every married couple will differ in small ways (quirks, preferences, etc.), true unity and companionship depend on working for the same goals. Loneliness may tempt us to accept an unsuitable spouse, but loneliness is not relieved by creating a divided life—it is only deepened. As Timothy Keller observes in his book *The Meaning of Marriage*, "If your partner doesn't share your Christian faith, then he or she doesn't truly understand it as you do, from the inside. And if Jesus is central to you, then that means that your partner doesn't truly understand *you*" (page 209).

My purpose in writing this article is not to burden Christians who have already bound themselves to non-Christians; believing spouses should remain in their relationships as salt and light (1 Cor. 7:12-16, 1 Pet. 3:1-2). Rather, I aim to provoke thought in the unmarried and to aid those who counsel them. Marriage was designed from the beginning as a union between two image-bearers of God who work side by side to increase His blessings on earth (Gen. 1:26-28). If the good news of Jesus is deeply rooted in the life of a disciple, he or she will look for someone to help them plant that good news in the hearts of their children, community, and local church. May we look to the Lord to build our houses, so that our building is not in vain (Ps. 127).

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We are very thankful to those who have voluntarily contributed the necessary funds to continue this publication. With the recent postal rate increases, this issue is expected to cost about \$875 which will leave a surplus of about \$448 to put toward the next issue.



Have You Seen These Video Sites?

Many people go to the internet to get answers to their Bible questions. Platforms such as YouTube are filled with sites purporting to teach the Bible. As always, we must be careful and discerning in what we watch and read. Nevertheless, it is good to use the public forums and modern technology to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here are two media sites that we recommend.



Appian Media has been producing quality videos for nearly a decade. Its focus has been primarily to make the historical and geographical sites of biblical times more accessible to people throughout the world. Their videography provides a colorful glimpse into the ancient world that most people would not otherwise see, and is also a backdrop for accurate biblical teaching and building the faith of viewers.



InLight Media is relatively new. It was started to meet the need for high-quality video content that is also biblically accurate in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its stated goal is to help people find biblical answers to their biggest questions. It exists to produce videos that inspire people to love the truth of Jesus Christ. It is seeking to do this through documentaries, interviews, and short explainer videos.

Neither of these entities are financed by local church treasuries. However, they do rely on the support of generous individuals. We encourage you to visit their websites, peruse what they have produced, and consider helping them as you are able.

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A Heart Like Jesus

By **MATT HENNECKE**

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HEART. Throughout the pages of the Bible—from Adam and Eve's fall in the garden to the warnings given the seven churches of Asia—the message is repeated over and over: We and God are in a battle for our hearts. He wants them. We resist giving them. If someone were to ask me for a brief synopsis of the Word of God, I'd say it's an amazing story about God's work to rescue our hearts. No other subject gets more attention in the Bible than the state of human hearts.

Someone once took the time to list all the adjectives used in the Bible to describe the heart of man. Want to guess how many hearts the Bible describes? Fifty. Fifty different adjectives. The list includes broken, pure, proud, wicked, obstinate, wise, hard, spiteful, contrite, uncircumcised, honest, heavy, and new.

Face it. Most of us at one time or another have suffered serious, spiritual heart disease.

Some of us may be suffering a life-threatening, spiritual heart condition right now. All our hearts—all of us—are desperate for help. Jeremiah gave the frightening diagnosis: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick..." (Jer. 17:9)

Thankfully the Bible reveals for us the heart of Jesus. It reveals Jesus' heart of compassion and love. It opens Jesus' heart to us as he was led to the cross to save us from our sinful hearts. His pure heart, his perfect heart, his glorious heart, his loving heart, his tender and compassionate heart—stopped beating on the cross for us.

Frankly, I'm amazed and humbled by his heart. Contemplating his heart renews my desire to look to Jesus and discover in him the heart I must strive to emulate. Are you ready too? If so, then recommit to opening the Word, exploring the heart of Jesus, and committing to becoming more like him. Let the treatment begin.

*The same
sun that softens
and melts butter
also hardens clay.*

*The same Son who
softens and melts
receptive hearts
also will harden
others.*

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from his Bible class book, A Heart Like Jesus*