

## **“The Plain Truth”**

### **Matthew 25:31-46**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
November 17, 2002

He made it plain and simple and I am glad. I like plain and simple. It is refreshing in a world that has become so complex and confusing.

Jesus wanted his disciples to know what was important to God. He was days away from dying and I suspect he knew it. He could face leaving them a little easier if they knew what God expected of them after he was gone. So, this was another attempt to help them understand. However, there was no room for error or misunderstanding. He had to make it plain and simple. I refer to it as the “plain truth.”

He told them a story about two groups of people, one that pleased God and another that did not. Those that pleased God were rewarded with staying connected to Him. The other group was cut off from God and separated from Him. I imagine that got their attention, don't you? It would have mine.

**Why do you think Matthew preserved this story?** I think he wanted us to know what is important to God, so important that we would be held accountable for doing it. And what would that be? It is responding to the needs of our neighbor, the very essence of His kingdom.

**You know what impresses me about what Jesus said about helping our neighbors? We can do it.** We can do the things he mentioned, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, practice hospitality, clothe the naked, care for the sick or give hope to the oppressed. Nothing on this list should overwhelm or intimidate us. These are basic human needs that require ordinary deeds of kindness to fulfill.

**These are things we can do, simple, ordinary things.** As a matter of fact, is there anything on this list that the average person in the pew cannot do? I don't think so.

**In addition, these are things we can do everyday.** There is nothing on this list that can be done on a Sunday but not a Monday or Tuesday. Nowhere in the text does it say that we must wait until a holiday to do these things. Certainly, we can do them at Thanksgiving but we can also do them in March or July. There is no wrong day or season to do a good deed.

**Furthermore, we can do these things alone or with others.** We can do them on our own without seeking anyone's approval or we can join others and do them at a designated time.

**The important thing, though, is that we do them. Why?** Because this is what the Kingdom of God is. The poor and needy have a special place in God's heart and all that love God will love them, too. He is a God of compassion and justice and His followers must be a people of compassion and justice. What is important to God must be important to us. If it is not, we are going to be terribly disappointed.

Read the story in Matthew again, carefully. You will find accountability, reward, punishment, life, death, connection and separation all through it. Especially look at the word “depart” in Matthew 25:41. It is a terrible word. There is no light or love in it. What does this word communicate? Why did Jesus use it? I think he wanted to drive home his point that helping the poor and needy was important to God. As a matter of fact, nothing was more important!

James would not disagree, would he? Listen to his opinion on this matter. *“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well: keep warm and well fed’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead”* James 4:14-17.

This attitude of compassion and justice was certainly reinforced by Jesus. He lived his life serving and helping his fellowman, especially those that others were ignoring or discarding.

**What about you?** Are you following in Jesus' footsteps? Have you adopted his values and lifestyle? Could you name one person that has food, clothing, shelter or encouragement today because of your actions last week? If not, what do you need to change in order to be more like Christ?

On October 26, 2002, Baptists lost one of their finest teachers and ministers when Dr. Finley Edge died. He was one of my professors at Southern Seminary, the one that introduced me to the idea that every Christian is a minister that has been given gifts by God to make the world better. "The role of the clergy is to equip the saints," he would say. "A lay person cannot pay someone else to fulfill his or her ministry to God. God has called His people to ministry and the ministry belongs to the laity whether they know it or not. And the ministry belongs to the laity whether they fulfill it or not," he wrote.

In light of Edge's quote and this passage from Matthew, let me ask the previous question again. **What do you need to change to be more like Christ reaching out to those who need your help?** I cannot answer that question for you, only challenge you to do so. However, I do have a suggestion for our church.

It has come to my attention that the Stone Mountain Coop has had to turn hungry people away because their pantry shelves were empty. This is not right. I cannot live with the fact that people within a five to ten mile radius of the church are hungry while my pantry and yours are filled with groceries. So here is what I would like for us to do. I want to tell Angie Callahan, the director, that she can call Smoke Rise when her shelves are getting low and we will respond. We'll provide the food she needs to get her through any emergency.

Now, I know we already collect food for the Lilburn and Stone Mountain Coops on a regular basis. We'll continue to do that. However, when either Coop is running low or has depleted their stockpile, I want us to see them through their emergency. I don't want anyone going hungry that lives on our church field.

This is why I want to place an additional offering box in the narthex where people can contribute to the Coops as a response to worship. I say additional box, because we already have boxes outside the office and at the entrance below the gym. I think we need one closer to the sanctuary, though. Helping the poor should come naturally from grateful people on their way to and from worship.

I challenge every believer to place something in the box each Sunday. It doesn't have to be a lot. Why not put your loose change in the box? Put your pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters in it. If all of us will do this each week, we'll make sure no child or adult will go to sleep hungry in our community.

I know this sounds plain and simple, but it will work. And remember, I like plain and simple.