

Undercover Boss

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0:00] A little while ago, the Eastern Cape Social Development MEC, named Bukiwe Fanta, got complaints that various Sasa offices, you know Sasa grants, the social development grant, were not being run very well.

! In a village called Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape. And so, what this MEC Bukiwe Fanta did is she went and disguised herself as a poor gogo, an old lady, and went into one of these Sasa offices as just one of the poor people who go there.

And she had a very interesting experience. She discovered that the officials in this particular office in this village were very rude, very dismissive of their clients. And after that experience, when she was back in her office as the MEC, she actually called each of those officials to account for how they had treated her, of course not knowing that it was her.

Now, it's not often that we have stories like this in South Africa where government officials are called to account. So, it's very encouraging to hear that it does happen. But those officials who were mistreating people, they thought there would be no problem.

They were doing their job. They were meeting their targets. It was fine. They were doing the job their boss wanted. They thought that, of course, until they were called to answer for how they treated this apparent nobody in their midst.

[1:47] Now, when we stand before Jesus one day at the judgment that is coming when He returns, many people will think that they're okay because they did what the boss wanted. They went to church. You know, they were religious.

But they won't realize that actually Jesus has been here all along in the form of the Christian sitting next to you. And that is why Jesus teaches in this very important teaching that a key indicator of how we end up on that day will not be how religious we were, but how we treated the least of these, our brothers and sisters.

That's really what we're going to learn today. And it has a big implication on how we live and how we relate with each other. Now, for the last few weeks, Jesus has been teaching about Judgment Day.

And you might, if you've come to all of the services for the last few weeks, be going, Oh, here we go again. Judgment Day again. Listen, it's not, I didn't choose this.

Jesus decided that a number of passages in sequence are going to talk about Judgment Day. Obviously, He wants to make sure we don't miss it, right? Obviously, it's that important. This day that's coming, it's so important that we get ready for it, that Jesus wants to make sure no one misses it.

[3:11] And He's taught us in the last few weeks that Judgment is going to come suddenly, that He's going to return suddenly with no warning. And so we've got to be ready every day.

We've got to make sure we're ready today. And then He taught us three very important parables on how to be ready. If you missed those, make sure you go to our website and listen to those, because you want to know how to be ready and what Jesus teaches about how to be ready for the Day of Judgment.

But now, in this last teaching on it, He's going to tell us why. Why we need to be ready. Because of just what's going to happen on that day. Let me read from verse 31.

You can follow along in your Bible. He says, When the Son of Man, He's talking about Himself, He's talking about His return in glory. He says, When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne.

He will sit on His glorious throne. Now, I don't know, maybe you're a skeptic. Maybe you're like, is this really going to happen? I just want to remind you, this is words spoken by the guy who also said

He would rise from the dead three days after He was crucified.

[4:27] And He did. Okay? His words are trustworthy. What He says is going to happen is going to happen. And He says, this is going to happen. When the Son of Man comes, He's going to come in His glory and all the angels with Him.

And it's going to be huge and nobody will be able to ignore it. He will sit on His glorious throne.

What glorious throne? Well, that is the throne of judgment. We read about this in Daniel 7 and other places.

The throne of judgment over humanity. Where God will entrust His Son, Jesus Christ, with the job of judging all humans for everything they've ever done.

And the reason God is going to entrust His Son with that job is that He is perfectly qualified for it. As God who became man, He is perfectly qualified to represent humans and God.

And so He is the one unique, perfectly qualified person to judge all humans. And it is going to happen. And He is coming. Now, we might not like this idea of judgment.

[5:31] You know, I don't come to church to hear about judgment. I want to, you know, feel good. Well, there is a lot about judgment in the Bible. We have got to hear about it. But the truth is, we all believe in judgment, actually.

You know, from the young child who says, that's not fair when their brother gets a bigger slice of cake than they do. To the rugby supporter who says, hey, ref, he's entering from the side.

Or there was a forward pass. You didn't see it, ref. And he's appealing to the sense of justice that must exist. To, of course, our feeling of corrupt officials getting taken out or getting arrested.

And the feeling of justice that we feel. You know, we all actually have this inbuilt sense of right and wrong, of justice. We all know there is such a thing as right and wrong.

And justice must be done. We believe, we all believe in judgment. Well, it turns out, so does God.

God believes in judgment. And He has told us time and time again in His words, something we can't ignore, that ultimate judgment is coming for each one of us.

[6:39] We're going to stand before our Maker. Ultimate judgment is coming. And it's coming through Jesus Christ, who will sit on His glorious throne.

And everyone will be there. Verse 32. All the nations will be gathered before Him. Will be gathered. All the nations. All the people in all the nations. Even those who have died.

The Bible says God will raise them all from, for that day. From the dead. Everyone will be gathered before Him. Everybody you've ever known and loved will stand before Jesus.

Every actor you've seen on your favorite movie or series. All of those actors, those people living in the mansions in Hollywood, they will stand before Jesus. Every president who thinks He's so powerful and in control now, will stand before the ultimate King of Kings.

And they will all be there. And you and I will be there. And then you know what's going to happen, Jesus tells us. A massive separation of humanity will take place.

[7:45] Listen to from verse 32. And He will separate the people one from another. As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Okay, so He's telling us that everybody who's ever lived, no matter what race they were, no matter what socioeconomic bracket they were in, no matter what country they were in, nationality, what age they lived in, everybody who's ever lived will end up in one of two groups.

At the end of time. The end of this age. And your entire life. And your entire eternity. Will come down to which group you end up in.

But right now. It is not easy to tell who is in which group. That's why Jesus uses this illustration of sheep and goats.

Okay, because in those days, and today as well, sheep and goats are often bred together. And raised together because they have similar eating patterns and similar habits.

[9:01] And so you can actually breed them together. And even back then, where sheep were super dirty, they often looked very similar to the goats who have a darker tone. And so sometimes it was very difficult to tell when they were all in a group together, which were the sheep and which were the goats.

That's why Jesus uses this illustration. He's telling us it's difficult right now to tell before the shepherd separates them, who is in which group. And that is why on that day to come, we're going to have, I think, some big surprises.

Because we're going to find that some people we thought were sheep, who maybe were in church with us, turn out to be in the goat group.

And we're going to find some people we thought to be goats, because they didn't believe the same things exactly the doctrines that we believe, are going to turn out to be on the right side of Jesus. We're going to have some big surprises, I think, on that day, when that separation happens.

But the important question is then, well, how do we tell now? How do we tell in the meantime? How do I know which group I'm in? And that's an important question. And you know what? That's why Jesus tells us this.

[10:10] He wants us to be able to evaluate ourselves. You know, but how do I tell if it's not just, well, I'm in church and I say the words on the screen.

Surely that's enough. No. Jesus is saying, no, there's a way you can tell, and it's not just because you're in church. Jesus actually says, if we read on, you can tell which group you're going to end up in by how you treat other Christians.

And that will be, he says, presented as the primary evidence on the day of judgment. Listen to what he says from verse 34.

Then the king will say to those on his right, Come, you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you look after me.

[11:09] I was in prison and you came to visit me. He is presented, this is like a court case scenario, and the evidence is being presented here. But then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink?

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go and visit you? The king will reply, listen to this, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

Okay, that is the big surprise of this passage, of this teaching. Even the people being judged didn't expect this. Didn't expect that the key indicator of what group they end up in, what side of Jesus they end up on, will be how they treated his people, the least of his brothers and sisters.

That is going to be the key evidence for how people end up on Judgment Day, Jesus is teaching here. Okay, now, first of all, that leads to two questions that you might be asking.

Firstly, doesn't it matter how we treat all people, not just Christians? Well, yes it does, but it's especially how you treat Jesus' people. Second question, but wait a minute, isn't this teaching judgment by works?

[12:30] Like, it seems that we are going to be judged for what we do, but the Gospel tells us that we are saved by grace because of what Jesus did for us, right? So isn't this teaching contrary to the Gospel?

Because as a Christian, I have rested in the fact that I am not going to be judged by what I do because Jesus has done it for me. But now it seems different. Now we are talking about judgment and being judged by how we treated other Christians.

Is this judgment by works, not grace? No, it's not. Because Jesus is not saying this is what saves you. But he is saying this will be the key indicator of if you are really saved.

This will actually show, this evidence will show who the real Christians were all along. It will be seen in how you treated other Christians, especially when they needed you.

Okay, so this is the key fruit. But of all the different fruit.

[13:35] Now, Jesus teaches there is a lot of different fruit of salvation. There is a lot of different ways that our salvation comes out in our life. And when we are in right relationship with God and we are truly saved, it is going to come out and issue in various fruit, Jesus says.

But of all the fruit, Jesus says this is the key one. This is the main evidence. Why is this? Why is this? Why is this? How we treat other Christians the main fruit and evidence of salvation on the day of judgment?

Well, Jesus goes on to explain and it is very important. He says, Because He, Jesus, dwells in His people, how we treat them is how we treat Him.

Verse 40. I'll remind you of what He said. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

Okay? What was done to them, Jesus says, was done to Him. Do you remember we were going through Acts in growth group? And when Stephen was persecuted, Jesus appeared to Paul, who was part of the persecution, and He said, You are persecuting me.

[14 : 49] Jesus has this deep, profound identification with His people because He dwells in them. And it's the same when He judges the goats. It's what they did to His people because of what they did to Him.

Verse 45. Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. So just like that MEC who went undercover to that Sasa office, Jesus is undercover in the least of His people today.

Which means that your actions and attitudes towards His people, whoever they are, are actually your actions towards Jesus.

That's what He's teaching here. Now this is based on a very profound idea in Scripture that the Bible teaches, which is something called union with Christ.

Doctrine. And what it teaches is that when a person truly believes, when a person truly comes to trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord, and is baptized into His name, they literally, in a very real way, enter into Jesus.

[16 : 06] He covers us. His righteousness becomes ours. His status, His glory becomes ours because we are inside Him in a very real mystical way.

But in the same way, the union with Christ teaches that He is in us. Both of those are true. That's what union with Christ means. We are in Him, but He is also in us.

We are in Him even though He is in heaven now, and He is in us even though we are on earth. And what He does is that because He is in us in a very real way, in Christians, all who truly believe, He works through us on earth.

That's how He does His work on earth. We are called His body because we are His physical, sort of empowered body on earth. This is how He does His work, through His churches, through His people.

We are His body. He is in us if we are Christians. But think about that. If He is inside each of His people on earth now, the implication is that what you do to them, you do to Him.

[17 : 10] When you snub another Christian, you are actually doing that to Jesus. When you slander another Christian behind their back, you are actually maligning the name of Christ.

That's what Jesus is teaching here. It's like the mafia, actually. You know those mafia movies where the young son gets beaten up or something on the street, and then the father finds out about it, like Father Corleone or whatever he is.

And you know how He responds? You insult my son. You insult me. You know those mafia movies? Well, that's what Jesus is saying. He is saying this about all of His people.

He is saying, you mess with my people. You mess with me. That's serious. And I don't know about you, but you know what that tells me?

It means that we should start being much more careful with how we treat each other, doesn't it? But also, how you treat people Jesus loves, actually is the ultimate proof of whether He really dwells in you.

[18 : 24] Because think about that. If Jesus dwells in you, then His love for His people should flow out of you, right? In fact, this is exactly what the Apostle John says in his letter, 1 John.

Let me read to you something from 1 John 3, verse 10. It says this, This is how we know who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother or sister. Verse 14 says, We know that we have passed from death to life.

How? Because we love each other. Verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

It's pretty clear, right? What the argument is there. That Jesus loves His people so much. He really does. And actually, we've got to stop and realize how much Jesus loves His people.

[19 : 32] He came to earth from heaven, entered our broken world, let Himself be arrested by people He could have killed in an instant, and let Himself be nailed to a cross, and basically tortured to death.

All because He loves His people enough that He wanted to save them from their sins, and so He paid for their sins. And He was the only person who could do that. And that's how much He loved

His people, to give Himself like that, sacrificially.

Sacrifice is the ultimate show of love. And that is what Christ did for you if you were one of His. But if He is in you, you know what that means? That love, that intense sacrificial love that He has for His people, will come out of you to His people.

Surely? Right? And so we need to, as we read this, we need to look seriously at whether it is actually coming out of us to His people.

Whether His love is coming out of us to His people genuinely, or whether it's just a show, whether we're just, you know, being sort of tolerant of His people, or nice to them because that's what Christians do.

[20:49] Or is it actually a genuine sacrificial love that is coming out of us to His people? That is the test of whether He's really in us or not. Whether His love will come out of us.

And we need to look seriously at whether it is. How are we loving Christ's people, especially those who need us? And in South Africa, there are still many, many, many Christians, genuine Christians, brothers and sisters, who are in dire need of help from their brothers or sisters.

What are we doing to help them? You know, I'm really encouraged that we're part of a denomination, like I said earlier, that actually has put in place plans, like the Simunya Fund.

Real plans, real work to help Christians, our brothers and sisters. And so it's great to be part of a denomination like that. And we need to, next week and the week after, sermon series that Dylan is going to do, on how to help the poor, we need to take that seriously.

If we're taking this teaching seriously, how do we actually practically help people who are in need? Not just say, I'll pray for you, and not do anything. You know, read James, if you want.

[22:07] James says that's just a farce. If you say you're going to pray for people, and you don't do anything for them. So how do we do? But actually, we go, okay, you know, we're part of a denomination. We've got this Simunya Fund that's helping people.

Okay, we've done our job. But actually, no, what about closer to home? What about in this church? The people who need you? Oh, no one needs me. Yes, they do. People need your time in this church community.

People need your companionship. People need your care. Maybe you don't know that they do, because you don't take any time to get to know the people around you, because it's much easier just to remain distant.

I think there are many people in churches who just come to listen to the sermon, and then go home, and they don't go to growth group, or they don't, you know, actually connect with God's people, because, well, that gets messy.

Well, I would advise you not to do that because of this teaching, because your love for Christ's people is actually the key litmus test for your relationship with Christ.

[23:10] You can't actually, the Bible does not give us any option to have a relationship with Christ without having a relationship with his people. And, of course, because of how he ends this passage, which is really sobering, the consequence of whether we've ended up in one or the other group.

Look at verse 46. And so what he's saying here is that those who were revealed on Judgment Day, as those who are truly saved because it was seen in their love for Christ's people, they will enter into life.

You think this is life? It's not life. It's not life. Jesus talks about real life, abundant life to come. In the age to come. That's what the word eternal here means, literally.

It means in the age to come. Age to come life. And this age to come has been spoken about in Scripture, and it's talking about the life that God has always intended for human beings to live.

He did not intend for this to be life. There is a life that God has made us for. It's what Jesus alludes to in verse 34. The king will say to those on his right, Come, you are blessed by my Father.

[24:39] Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

There is a kingdom. There is a life to come that is prepared for God's people. A life and a world with no sin, no pain, no hatred.

And the reason it will be a world like that is because it will be a world that is populated by people who love like Jesus loves. Because they have been transformed to be like Jesus.

That is what happens to all true Christians. They change more and more to become like Jesus.

That Jesus, that man who is our Lord and Savior and God himself who walked this planet and is in heaven and is coming back.

And we saw him and we as humans got to walk with him and interact with him. That Jesus is not just, he didn't just come to show us how he saves us and who God really is.

You know what else he came to show us? He came to show us what God's goal for humans has always been in himself. He is the ultimate example of what God wants each one of us to be.

[25 : 53] Each human being who inhabits the world to come is going to be like Jesus. Jesus is the perfect representative of what God has always intended for you and me to be. It's God's goal for us.

And all true Christians are being transformed to become like that one day. Now, in my time as a Christian, I've come across many different Christians who are at many different points in that journey to become like Jesus.

And I've come across many people who are much further down the road than I am. And these people have made such an impression on me.

These people are people who are outward focused. They care for the people around them. They make the people around them feel valuable somehow.

They're focused on them. And they don't have ulterior motives. They never hold a grudge. They never slander. And you know what? These people, when you come across them, and maybe you've come across one or two who are much closer to being transformed to Christ than you or me.

[27 : 04] You know what? These are the best people. These are the best people in the world. They might not be the most beautiful. They might not be the most funny. But they are the people we want to be around. They are the people, when I come across them, that I just want to be around because they are little bits of heaven in this broken world.

And when I experience people like that, I'm reminded of what I want to be. And I realize how much I'm not yet. And that causes me to pray, Lord, make me more like that.

Transform me more into the image of Christ. Help me to be more outward focused. Help me to be more loving because actually, these are the best people. I want to be like that.

And of course, because the world to come will only consist of people like that. Think about that for a second. Think about how amazing that will be when we live in a world where everybody is like Jesus.

Everybody is completely outward focused and completely loving towards the people around them. Everybody deeply values everyone else around them. Won't that be an amazing society to live in?

[28 : 15] That is the world to come. But you and I only get to be part of that if we let Jesus change us into his image.

And for those who don't, for those who want to stay as they are, who are focused on themselves, who, you know, as that Old Testament reading portrayed, are people who are pushing and shoving others out of the way so that they can get the best set up for them and their own immediate family. People who distance themselves from those in need because it's too uncomfortable. These are people who remain unchanged and they show that they never had Jesus in them.

Even if they came to church every Sunday. They show that they were never saved. And so, as Jesus says, the only thing that's waiting for them is punishment in the age to come and no hope of entering eternal life.

And that is very sobering. You see, if we are really saved from that punishment, if we are really heading to life in future, it will be seen in starting to live and love the way God saved us to now.

[29 : 43] And Jesus is telling us all of this so that we can stop and evaluate ourselves and evaluate our lives before that day comes. He doesn't want us to, you know, when he speaks through his word, which is this entire thing, by the way, not just the red letters, if you've got a red letter Bible.

Jesus inspired all of this. When he speaks to us, he doesn't want us just to go, oh, that was nice and go home and it does not change us. He wants this to change us. If it doesn't change us, it means there's something deeply wrong.

And so, he wants this teaching that he's giving now to cause us to evaluate our own lives before he comes. And maybe, as you're sitting here and doing that, maybe, if you're honest with yourself, you're saying, you know, truth is I don't love Christ's people.

In fact, I find them rather irritating. The truth is I don't want to be around them. Is there maybe another way to tell how I'm going to do on Judgment Day than that?

Because that's not for me. No. That's the way that Jesus is going to tell. But the good news, the good news is you can change.

[30 : 55] Okay? That's the good news of the Gospel. You can let Jesus in to transform you, to become like him, which is what God, your Creator, has always intended for you. And he will if you let him, but you first need to do something for that to happen.

You need to let go of your own self-focused and self-driven life. And you need to surrender your life to Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Will you do that?

Will you do that? Not just say you're a Christian, but will you actually do that? So he comes in and changes you and transforms you to become the kind of human God always intended, who lives a life of self-giving love, fit for the world to come.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for coming and teaching us truth. And this truth is what we all need to hear. And we pray, Lord, that you would help this truth to settle in our hearts and not to stay without doing something to us.

Lord Jesus, would you change us? Would you transform us? Would you fill us with your spirit?

Would you change us as this church, as these Christians, to love each other and to love our fellow brothers and sisters who are in need?

[32 : 07] Lord, transform us to become like you and help us to find that in there, in being transformed to your likeness, is all true joy. Lord, we pray, as we wait for you to come back and for the new age to come.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.