

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

◆ **ME:** *Before we begin I'd like to make an apology of sorts for the small group material in this series. More than one life group has understandably voiced some concerns about it. I have personally found it theologically frustrating, and emphatically contrary to orthodox Christianity in multiple ways. I was hoping for better. While there is certainly true information, and while I have previously appreciated outstanding teaching by the author, this material is mixed with a fair amount of what I would call unbiblical interpretation. So much so that I really don't recommend continued use of the video. There is value in listening to opposing views in that it forces us to evaluate our own. And I hope that is what's happening. But if you are experiencing the same thing I'm describing, you might consider just using the study guide, and picking out questions directly related to being irresistible Christians, or perhaps just having a discussion of my sermon and it's text. My goal in preaching this series has been to actually unveil biblical texts that point us to irresistible qualities in Christianity. And that's what I'll continue to do. Ok? So today we'll dig into Mt 25.*

◆

◆ 1) I was at a concert and during intermission workers came down the aisles while a fellow on stage presented Compassion International, a ministry in which you can sponsor a child in India, for example, for a few dollars a day and give them food and education they otherwise wouldn't have. Does that kind of

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

thing make you uncomfortable? We've actually sponsored kids for years and I still felt funny, like someone should say YES to this need right now, and I'm not because I already do, but it just looks like none of us here cares! 2) I was driving to the grocery store in the rain and at the stop light, there was a little man, with a little car, on the shoulder of the road trying to change a tire, which was clearly something he had no idea about. He was getting all wet. Have you ever seen something like that too, and wondered what you should do? I mean you're on a task, you have a time table, you're comfortably dry at the moment. And changing a tire is child's play for you cuz you fix your own vehicles!?

3) Halloween is here, so you know that means all the Christmas decor is for sale right now, and pretty quick you might find yourself walking past a Salvation Army bell-ringer. If you look straight ahead you can pretend you don't see that bell that you can *hear* jingling jingling in your ears all the way to the car, where you put that extra big box of Sam Adam's Octoberfest.

◆**WE:** I think you'll agree that there's a whole list of feelings you might have, or thoughts that very quickly speed through your head in situations like I've been describing. Like...

- ◆ "What difference will a little change make anyway?"
- ◆ Someone else will do it.
- ◆ I'd kinda like to help, but I don't know that guy from Adam, how do I know the money will get back to the Salvation Army?

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

◆ I've got a lot to get done today.

◆ If I don't get this beer home on time the wife will be hopping mad!"

◆ **GOD:** If you're the kind of person who notices situations like I've been describing and thinks about them more than once, I think that God has been rubbing off on you. One thing is clear in the Bible: God's heart and his commands have always been on the side of the lowly and least. Sometimes folks teach that Jesus' concern for the least was a brand new idea, but he learned it from God his Father. Let's survey the scriptures on it.

◆ 1) The people of Israel knew this. It was embedded in their laws and culture all the way back to Moses and the 10 **Commandments**. The first 4 commandments are about our relationship to God (idols, using God's name, a day of worship, etc). Call them the vertical commands. The second six commandments are about our relationship to people around us. Call them the horizontal commands. (I find it interesting that the Cross is a combination of a vertical and a horizontal line!)

◆ 2) Old Testament prophets consistently lay down God's requirement in loving your neighbor/the poor/the needy as more important than sacrificing at the temple!

◆ Proverbs 21:3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

◆ *Isaiah 1:11 "The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the LORD... Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

◆ (The prophet Micah 6:8 says the same thing. The prophet Hosea 6:6 says it too.)

◆ 3) You might recall that Jesus summarized the summary of God's commands with the same two parts.

◆ Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (so do the Big Ten.)

◆ Many scholars point out that Rabbinic tradition summarized God's requirements with the same 2 pronged approach hundreds of years before Jesus. The greatest commandment was a text every Jew recited literally every morning (Dt.6)! The second one comes from Leviticus 19, an exposition of the Ten Commandments, which also lists this interesting idea:

◆ *'When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of*

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. v34

◆ Seems the Jews were to think of the other nations around them as their neighbors too. Now granted, they didn't do it all that well. But they couldn't say they didn't know better.

◆ 4) How about our text in Mt.25? Jesus speaking of the Final Judgement says, God will separate all people into two groups; those who are his (sheep) and those who are not (goats). His will join him in his home, heaven. The others will get the only other option; someplace without God or any good; "eternal punishment". Both get what they really want. Some want God and everything that goes with him. Some want nothing to do with him. How you can tell in Mt.25 which is a sheep and which is a goat can simply be seen in their view of the lowly and least. The ones who are God's are just like him.

◆ **YOU1:** Now if you're a follower of Christ, this means that it will be normal for you to ever be growing in your love for the lowly and the least. I say 'normal' because the Sheep in Jesus' story were surprised that they had served the Lord himself. They didn't realize it, it was just normal for them. They weren't doing it to get a payoff, or to make up for their sins. And God had planned their reward "from creation of the world" v34, so it wasn't a result of all their good deeds. They didn't have to earn God's Kingdom.

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

It's all part of the package of loving God. Jesus earned it for them. That, by the way, is why he's the "King" in the story.

◆ So to grow in your love for the least you'll be wondering who the least are, so that you can develop love for them.

◆ In the book, *The Zookeeper's Wife*, author Diane Ackerman describes the brutal occupation of Warsaw, Poland by the Nazis. The Warsaw Zoo became a hiding place for members of the Resistance and Jewish refugees. Keeping one person alive often required putting a great many in jeopardy. It tested them nonstop as they resisted both propaganda and death threats. Yet 70,000-90,000 people in Warsaw, or about one-twelfth of the city's population, risked their lives to help neighbors escape. Besides the rescuers and Underground helpers, there were maids, postmen, milkmen, and many others who didn't inquire about extra faces or extra mouths to feed

◆ Who are the least near you? Try asking some questions:

- ◆ Who would it cost you to be involved with?
- ◆ Who are you afraid to be involved with?
- ◆ Who in your world strikes you as messy?
- ◆ Who is an alien around you?
- ◆ Who are you too busy for?
- ◆ Of what or who do you say, "not my problem."?
- ◆ Who might be being treated as insignificant?

◆ The answers to these will help you find the God-ordained recipient of all your love for God himself.

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

◆**YOU2:** And if you are skeptical about Christ and Christianity, you have a challenge too. First, you'll have to reconsider some of your assumptions about the God of the Bible. You might assume that accepting God's authority over your life means you are doomed to a life of strenuous rule-keeping or else! It's never been that way with God. God is for you, not against you.

◆*Galatians 4:4-5 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

◆God commandments aren't how you get redeemed. They are just the many ways you love him back. At the same time, God's commands don't doom me to misery, they are the many ways we find the good life he demands we have.

◆And second, consider emulating God's love for the lowly and the least as well. Why? Well, for one I think more of God will rub off on you and that's always a good thing. And for two, the world you have to live in will become a better place for you too. You'll be more likely to have someone stop to help you in the rain when that's the kind of world you're investing in.

◆1) Several years ago, [two researchers at the] University of British Columbia tested whether short conversations with strangers could lift moods. They asked participants to enter a busy coffee shop and grab a beverage — half would get in and get out, and half would strike up a conversation with the cashier. The people who turned the economic transaction

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

into a quick social interaction left Starbucks in a better mood. They even felt a greater sense of belonging in their community.

◆2) Another researcher led a series of experiments revealing that train and bus commuters who interacted with other passengers experienced a more pleasant ride—even when they believed they would prefer the solitude of, say, reading a book.

◆3) A third researcher noted that even brief eye contact increased people's sense of inclusion and belonging.

◆We can conclude that showing any attention at all to the “least of these” actually makes your day a better experience.

◆**WE:** Let's return to the whole theme of this series Irresistible. Early Christians dramatically altered the Roman Empire. And for that matter, Christians have been altering history, and countries, and people groups ever since. We've been asking how can we live out our faith in a way that is more irresistible, instead of getting tripped up in our witness by doing and being ways that push people away from God. I think Jesus' story is revealing that When I am looking out for everybody else I am far more irresistible than when I'm looking out for myself.). And what kind of city would it be where the SA bell ringer goes home in 30 minutes because so many people want to share? And what kind of evacuations from wars would take place where everyone is looking out for the least, and vulnerable? And how afraid would

INSIGNIFICANT PEOPLE, MT.25:31-46

Irresistible #4

you be in a neighborhood where everyone is as concerned about your property as they are about theirs, and people pick up trash on your lawn when they see it even though it's not their problem?

◆ I remind us, we sinful humans are not God's problem. Scripture says he can make good people out of rocks with a word of his mouth. But, after we made Earth and Humanity a least and lowly place in our sin, Jesus did not say, "not my problem." Instead he took our problem(sin) on himself, and suffered in our place, and paid what we owed. So every time you love the least, you're just imitating what he did for you.