Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: Improving Your Serve

Text: Matthew 25:31-46 -- "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, '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?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Introduction: A Christian was found reading his Bible by an atheist friend who considered himself quite the intellectual. Unable to hide his disapproval, the atheist approached his friend and asked, "***Do you believe it***?" referring to the Bible. "***I most certainly do***," came the reply. "***Even the story of Jonah and the whale***?" "***Uh-huh***," he answered once again. "***Alright, how did it happen?***" "***To be honest with you I don't know. I guess I'll find out when I get to heaven***." With a smirk on his face, the atheist friend asked a follow-up question, "***What if Jonah isn't there?***" "***Well then,"*** said the Christian, ***"you'll have to ask him for me***."

This morning, we're going to launch into the third part of the strategy that we have adopted for making disciples of Christ. The first two are **WORSHIP AND GROW**. You can listen to any of the first six messages by going to our website at **www.riverridge.online**. The third has to do with the ministry that we have as Christians and comes under the heading -- **SERVE**. As we prepare to look at our text and what it tells us about the disciple of Christ as a minister, allow me to provide you with some of the historical background for it.

Background: As Jesus' earthly ministry drew to a close, His followers naturally wanted to know more about when He would return and what would take place when He did. So, beginning in **Matthew Chapter 24** and going through **Chapter 25**, our Lord teaches about future things. Here in these verses, Christ addresses **three important questions** that not only weighed heavily on the minds of His disciples two thousand years ago, but are very pertinent to us as well, especially as world events seem to be aligning themselves with what the Bible teaches about the end times: These three questions include: ***What awaits us? What distinguishes us? What motivates us?*** Let's spend the next twenty-five minutes or so and consider what He has to say about each.

What awaits us (**Matthew 25:31-33 -- -- "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left**)? We are told by Christ that sometime in the future He will come back to earth in His glory with all the angels to sit on His throne. In this unique position, Jesus will function in two roles: **(1) as King to rule over all of creation**, and **(2) as the Judge of all mankind**. Let's look into this a little more.

- **As King, He will sit on His glorious throne**. **Following the rapture of the church mentioned in places like John 14:2-4 -- In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I**

go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also, the unbelievers who remain will face seven terrible years of tribulation. Many of them will perish, but not all. At the end of these seven years, Christ will come in His glory and command that Satan will be bound and cast into the Abyss where he will be unable to deceive the nations for 1,000 years (**See Revelation 20:1-3**). Then Jesus will take His seat on His throne where He will reign over the earth for a millennium.

- **As Judge, He will separate the sheep from the goats**. In nature, sheep and goats often mingled during the day, but at night they were inclined to separate: **Sheep tolerate the cool air, but goats have to be herded together for warmth**. ***Jesus, we are told, will return and divide everyone into two groups***.
  - **Sheep** (i.e. believers). **These will inherit the kingdom** (**Matthew 25:33-34 -- And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**). **This is the inheritance talked about in passages like Romans 8:17 -- Now if we are children, then we are HEIRS — HEIRS of God and CO-HEIRS with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. The people characterized as sheep love the Lord (James 2:5 -- Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?) and will inherit His kingdom.**
  - **Goats** (i.e. unbelievers). **These people will not inherit His kingdom, but will go away to eternal punishment** (**Matthew 25:41 -- Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**). Unbelievers will be banished from the presence of the King and sent to eternal fire. **While the kingdom was prepared for the righteous, Hell was prepared for the Devil, his angels** (**See Revelation 20:10**), **and now for those referred to in this passage as goats**. **This is what anyone should expect when Christ returns – a separation of the sheep and the goats, with the former to inherit the kingdom and the latter to be sent to eternal fire. GOOD FOR THE SHEEP who joyfully received the good news AND BAD FOR GOATS who rejected it.** On August 17, 2008, **Dave Freeman**, co-author of the book ***100 Things to Do Before You Die***, died at age 47 from a head injury incurred in a fall at his home. It was his book that inspired the movie ***The Bucket List*** starring **Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson**. Dave Freeman's own list included things like attending the Academy Awards, running with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain, and taking a voodoo pilgrimage in Haiti. The story drips with irony as ***Freeman had gotten to do only about 50 of the things on his list before he died, reminding us that we may never accomplish all the things we hope to do***. He took a knock on the head and died at a relatively young age with much on his list left undone. ***And tragically perhaps for Freeman, among the 100 things Freeman and his co-author suggested that others do before they die, they did not include preparing for the Day of Judgment by entering into a relationship with Jesus Christ***. I guess that puts them on the side of the goats. (**REVIEW: What awaits us? The answer is a place in the kingdom or a place in Hell.)**

What distinguishes us? Jesus gives us a simple way to distinguish between the sheep and the goats. It is their response to the ***'least of these brothers of mine***.' While the Bible elsewhere tells us to do good to all men (**See Galatians 6:10**), our Lord notes here that what identifies Christians from everyone else is our desire to minister to our brothers and sisters. Now let me say here that some Bible scholars believe this passage is talking about people in general while others believe it's referring to those in Christ. **In full disclosure, I lean to the latter. Now let's see what it says**.

- **Sheep are recognized as they serve the needs of THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS (Matthew 25:35-36 -- For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me). Sheep care for God's people, who, in the process of seeking to remain faithful to the Lord in a world that is perishing find themselves suffering as a result. The sheep are identified by the sacrifices they make on behalf of those who lack sufficient FOOD or WATER, a ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS, and CLOTHING to keep**

them warm; **who battle SICKNESS or LONELINESS as they languish in prison, as they suffer for their faith in Christ**.

- **Goats are recognized as they ignore the needs of THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS** (**Matthew 25:41–43 -- "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me**). **Goats neither have the time nor the inclination to bless the people of God, so they close their eyes to their needs**. The Lord told His disciples how to handle this kind of situation when He sent them out (**if any place will not receive you or listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust of your feet as a testimony against them—Mark 6:11**). **One more comment here**: It's clear that the sheep did not earn their place in the kingdom by their treatment of others, because it was prepared for them before they were even born -- before the foundation of the world! We are all saved by grace through faith in our Lord! The point being made is that sheep are distinguished from goats by whom they care for – their brothers and sisters. (**REVIEW: What awaits us? The answer is a place in the kingdom or a place in Hell.) What distinguishes us? Our treatment of our brothers and sisters (in Christ)).**

What motivates us? **At the risk of being redundant, let me repeat myself**. Jesus is not teaching here that those who care for the poor and downtrodden will inherit the kingdom for their efforts. Otherwise, it makes no sense that both the believers and unbelievers were surprised by Christ's teaching that their treatment of Christians was a measuring stick for what it means to be a part of the kingdom of heaven. No, our Lord's point is very simple: **How we serve one another is the best possible indicator of where our primary allegiance lies**.

- **Christians love and serve Christ** (**Matthew 25:37-40 -- Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me**). This is the highest priority of every believer. **Because we love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, and mind** (**See Matthew 22:37**), **we are completely devoted to Him before all others** (**Matthew 10:37-39 -- Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me).** It was **Augustine** who said, "*Christ is not valued at all unless He is valued above all*."
- **Christians love and serve one another.** Our Lord so identifies with the church that when we treat other believers well, we are treating Him well (**See Hebrews 6:10**). In fact, faith in the Lord and love for the brethren go hand in hand (**Philemon 4-5 -- I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints).** The opposite is also true—when we act in a way that inflicts injury on Christians, we are demonstrating complete disregard for Christ (**Matthew 25:41-45 -- Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, '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?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me**). Christ loves His church, of that there is no doubt. The questions for us today are, "**Do we love it too? And if so, how do we show it?**" You see, it is not enough to speak well of other believers. We must back up our words with deeds that cannot be mistaken for anything but the unconditional and sacrificial love of God born in our hearts through Christ. **If judgment awaits us all and ministry to one another distinguishes us from one another, then it is love for Christ that serves to motivate us to care for one another!**

Conclusion: **John Blanchard** straightened his Army uniform, and studied the crowd of people making their way through **Grand Central Station**. He looked for the girl whose heart he knew, but whose face he didn't—the girl with the rose. His interest in her had begun when he visited a second-hand book store looking for something to read. He began to browse one particular book of interest, but it was not the words of the book that intrigued him. Rather it was the notes penciled in the margin. The soft handwriting reflected a thoughtful soul and insightful mind. In the front of the book he discovered the previous owner's name, **Miss Hollis Maynell**. It didn't take long to locate her address—she lived right there in New York City. He wrote her a letter introducing himself and inviting her to correspond. **Twenty-four hours later he was shipped overseas for service in World War II.** During the next year the two of them grew to know each other through the mail. Each letter was a seed falling on a fertile heart. A romance was budding. Blanchard requested a photograph, but she refused. She felt that if he really cared about her, it wouldn't matter what she looked like. When the day finally came for him to return from Europe, they scheduled their first meeting—7:00PM at the Grand Central Station in New York. "***You'll recognize me***," she wrote, "***by the red rose I'll be wearing on my lapel***." So, at 7:00 he was in the station looking for a girl whose heart he loved, but whose face he'd never seen. **Here's his story in his own words:** A young woman was coming toward me, her figure long and slim. Her blonde hair lay back in curls from her delicate ears; her eyes were blue as flowers. Her lips and chin had a gentle firmness, and in her pale green suit she was like springtime come alive. I started toward her, entirely forgetting to notice that she was not wearing a rose. As I moved, a small, provocative smile curved her lips. '***Going my way, sailor?***' she murmured. Almost uncontrollably I made one step closer to her, and then I saw Hollis Maynell. She was standing almost directly behind the girl. A woman well past 40, she had graying hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump, her thick-ankled feet thrust into low-heeled shoes. The girl in the green suit was walking quickly away. I felt as though I was split in two, so keen was my desire to follow her, and yet so deep was my longing for the woman whose spirit had truly companioned me and upheld my own. And there she stood. Her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible; her gray eyes had a warm and kindly twinkle. I did not hesitate. This would not be love, but it would be something precious, something perhaps even better than love, a friendship for which I had been and must ever be grateful. I squared my shoulders and saluted and held out the book to the woman, even though I felt choked by my disappointment. "'***I'm Lieutenant John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to dinner?***'" "The woman's face broadened into a tolerant smile. '***I don't know what this is about, son***,' she answered, '***but the young lady in the green suit who just went by, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I should tell you that she is waiting for you in the big restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test!***'" ***MISS MAYNELL WILL NOT BE THE ONLY ONE TO HAVE TESTED THE TRUE AFFECTION OF ANOTHER. GOD WILL AS WELL AND HIS TEST WILL MAKE IT CLEAR WHO ARE THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS AT HIS JUDGMENT!***