

# Materialism

## By Bryan Loritts

What a joy and a privilege it is to be with you again, my dear fellow, by all means, I bring you greetings from Memphis, Tennessee, where Elvis and I had breakfast yesterday morning. It's amazing how many of those people still think he's alive. What an honor to be here. And I say that in all sincerity to you this morning. I don't just say that to be nice or because it is appropriate. I say that because I am as long as I'm here on this earth indebted to this school and this university for the incredible deposit that they have made in my life in many regards, whatever I become, whatever things that I do for the kingdom, is ultimately to the glory of God, but to the glory of God through this school.

And I praise God still, for faithful professors like Dr. Walt Russell in Dr. Clint Arnold and Dr. Henry Hullermann, among others who invested heavily in my life, it has changed my life. I got a little teary eyed making that left turn on the Rosecrans. It brought back so many memories as 10 years or so ago. I was living here in Southern California making 18000 dollars a year, wondering how I was going to live. Praise God for Top Ramen.

[Applause]

And God used this school mightily, so there's a lot of history, Dr. Cook, for your faithful leadership, you and your wife. Thank you so much for all that you do. Well, if you have your Bibles, if you could please meet me in Matthew Chapter 25. Our theme for this week is get an

attitude, Matthew, Chapter 25. I don't want to preach this message that I'm going to preach this morning, quite frankly, I have gone through a season of prayer and fasting, begging God as it relates to what I should share with you.

And this is a message that God put on my heart this morning to let you know where we're going to go from the teaching standpoint. During my time with you, my message is we're going to focus this week from a very missional perspective. This morning, I'm going to talk about the need for Christians to engage in social justice. And I'm going to specifically talk about this issue of engaging the less fortunate. I'm concerned by all at the degree of passivity that has gripped the conservative evangelical community.

I am concerned for the depth of materialism that is so pervasive among the conservative evangelical church. Just last week, I sat in a community group meeting and I listened to the community group members. Some of them are looking for a new house and wanting to monopolise the prayer time by saying, please pray that I get this three hundred thousand dollar mortgage so I can buy this five or six bedroom house. Nothing's wrong with that. Yet my mind is drawn to the 54000 who have died in South Asia.

And while many of our conservative evangelical students are more consumed in, the number one question on their list is how can I scrape together money to buy madden 2006? There are people today whose biggest question is How can I eat? Ron Sider in his book The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience, has noted that in the last 30 years, conservative evangelicals, our salaries have grown through the roof. No brainer, but at the same time, our giving has steadily

declined. The average conservative evangelical only gives 2.5 percent of their income to the church, the cause of Jesus Christ.

So this morning I want to shake us out of our passivity by looking to these controversial words of Jesus. Tomorrow, I'm going to talk about the issue of race by looking in Acts Chapter 10. I stand almost with tears in my eyes as I do battle in Memphis, Tennessee, the second most segregated city in the country where what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said back in the 60s and what Dr. Tony Evans says in the 80s are still ringing true Sunday mornings.

God peers over the balcony of heaven to see his kids divide into little homogeneous communities and segregate during the 11 o'clock hour. And we sit idly by and passivity. And I want to call us out of that. Let me just add these words before I read this text. I've preached this message in several places to my conservative evangelical brethren, and it is always met with a bit of controversy. Let me please say I affirm salvation by grace, through faith.

I will hold and treasure that doctrine to the day that I die. In fact, if you back me into a corner, I'm a 4.5 Calvinist. Even five point Calvinists can't convince me on limited atonement, but I believe in the sovereignty of God, I believe that unless God on May 4th, nineteen seventy seven, unless by his initiative, he would have reached down into that pit of hell and snatched my soul out, I believe that it is impossible for me to have entered into the kingdom unless the sovereign God would have first initiated. I believe all that. Hold onto that truth, friends, as we get into this text here now, the familiar words of Jesus beginning in verse thirty one of Matthew 25. When the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne

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, and he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

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. 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. Then the righteous verse thirty seven will answer and sing Lord when did we see you hungry and feed. You were thirsty and give you drink. And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothed you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? 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.

Conversely verse forty one: Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me. You burst into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For 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 welcome me naked and you did not clothe me sick and in prison and you did not visit me. 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? Then verse forty five: 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 it, you did not do it to me. These will go into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. I want to talk about engaging the less fortunate. Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, you know, that sense of trepidation I feel as I preach this message, I would much rather preach something that is more warm and fuzzy and cozy, that causes us to look introspectively and to ponder the disciplines, for example, or the other aspects of life. And yet, Father, our world this year in 2005 has been rocked with devastation as never before. My own dear sister was in New Orleans when Katrina hit. 54,000 killed by the earthquake. Lives that continue to be devastated in Iraq. And we need not look to these natural catastrophes, I now think of that single mom in Compton struggling to make ends meet. I think of the kids in Memphis, where about 20 percent of them live below the poverty line.

Oh, God forgive the evangelical church for sidestepping the inner cities and for being so focused on the global aspect of missions that we have neglected our own communities. It should never be an either/or but a both/and. Oh Father rock us to our core this morning in this country, Lord God, we confess that we have worshipped the idol of comfort and materialism. And you call us to minister to those in need, as I've prayed many times before. So once again, I now pray, stand in my body, think with my mind and speak with my tongue.

Those things you would have us no say. And do I abdicate myself of any thought or responsibility that I exist this morning to make anyone feel bad? That is not my role. My role is to simply be that mouthpiece that you speak through, that Bush like you spoke through that Bush to Moses. Now speak through this one this morning. I pray as Charles Spurgeon prayed - the great 19th century preacher - that I would take my text and make a beeline for the cross. Be with us. We pray, amen.

On October 28, 1787, a young parliamentarian etched these words in his diary: God Almighty has set before me two great objects; the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners. That man's name was William Wilberforce. Outside of Jesus Christ, I can think of no other individual in the theatre of world history who did more to change his world, society and generations than William Wilberforce. Parenthetically, as a man of African descent, I praise God for William Wilberforce. If it were not for Wilberforce, I may not even be here today, but may be still be bound in slavery.

His story is a rather interesting one. At the age of twenty one, William Wilberforce and his friend William Pitt were at a party and on a whim the two said, Let's run for Parliament! William Wilberforce thought it a good idea and spent nine thousand pounds in that day. It was the equivalent of fifty thousand dollars in that day, several hundreds of thousands of dollars in today's economy. He ran for parliament. Him and William Pitt did, and they won.

Parenthetically, William Pitt would go on to become prime minister of England, William Pitt at the age of 21, rather, William Wilberforce at the age of 21 now gets a seat in Parliament. Four years later, at the age of 25, William Wilberforce comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

He's now faced with a dilemma. What does he do? He's twenty five years old. He sits on parliament and yet he sits on a government and is a part of giving leadership to a nation who endorses slavery. He feels the dilemma as a follower of Christ. How could he give party to such a social injustice as slavery? He's confused. He wonders whether or not he should resign. And so he decides to go pay a visit to an Anglican pastor by the name of John Newton.

If John Newton, that name rings a bell that should. He was an ex slave trader who wrote these words: Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found was blind. But now I see... This confused, beleaguered Wilberforce walks into the house of this slave trader now turned Anglican pastor. He says to him, Here's my plight. Here's my dilemma. What do I do? John Newton gives these words to Wilberforce that would change the course of his life: It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up, young William, for the good of the nation.

These words strengthened Wilberforce shortly afterwards. He would write these words. My walk is a public one, but my business is in the world and I must mix in the Assemblies of Men or quit the post, which Providence seems to have assigned me. So convinced that now his work was a viable avenue to advance the purposes of God. William Wilberforce in Christmas of 1787 serves notice to Parliament that he intended to bring about the abolition of the slave trade. Standing there before Parliament, he declared these words: My great cause is the abolition of the trade. All others are secondary. I would never rest until I had effected its abolition.

Years go by and bitter attacks. Slave traders tried to take his life. He's seen as the scorn of the nation. Finally, on February 24th, 1807, the trade was abolished. I like this side note. William Wilberforce and William Pitt are celebrating the end of the slave trade. They're at a party and someone says to William Wilberforce, what are you going to do now? Wilberforce says, Look for something else to abolish. Then three days before his death in 1833, England, because of Wilberforce, declared slavery. Not just the trade illegal, all in part, listen to me, friends to a

Christian man who could not sit in passivity, who could not relegate his Christianity to an air conditioned cushion a few moments on a Sunday morning where they sang some hymns, heard a good sermon, and that was it for his Christianity.

Here was a man who was the forerunner to Martin Luther King Jr., who lived Martin Luther King Jr.'s anthem. That injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Here was a man who said because he could name the name of Jesus Christ, he had the same time, bore the burden and the responsibility to do something about the society in which he lived. Surely William Wilberforce is counted among the sheep enjoying the presence of God because here was a man who engaged the lives of the less fortunate.

Listen to me, friends. If you get nothing else I say this morning, get this. The message that Jesus gives in Matthew Chapter 25, this controversial message is simply this: You cannot have any biblical assurance of your salvation if you have neither the heart nor the acts towards the less fortunate in the society in which you live to name the name of Jesus Christ. Yet watch injustice and abortion and poverty and suffering. To merely watch those things in passivity is a contradiction of terms.

These words are controversial. We don't like to hear these words, but they're needed. As we come to our text, you need to understand some things historically before we can get to the punchline. Hang in there with me. I promise you, I'm coming to your neighborhood.

But the book of Matthew is arranged around five or six discourses or teachings of Jesus Christ. Matthew, Chapter twenty five. Our passage represents the last teaching of Christ prior to the Cross. Not long after this sermon is given, he will be betrayed, beaten, bound, led up to a hill called Calvary, crucified and resurrected the third day, according to the Scriptures. In his last sermon, Jesus Christ Pictures a day when all of mankind has gathered before him, the king who sits as a judge on one side, he will divide to his right the place of prominence in favor the sheep.

And on the other side he will divide to his left the place of dishonor in disfavor the goats. And here in this passage, Jesus Christ preaches on judgment and hell, it's a fine topic for your farewell exit sermon, let me stop right here and take a break.

I'm concerned by all of that. The state of our pulpits across this country has compromised the truth of scriptures. Where are the Jonathan Edwards of this generation who preached the sinners in the hands of an angry God kind of sermons? We have now relegated our sermons to feel good messages where sin is no longer called sin. It's merely called issues or baggage. We have wash our hands of the bloodiness of the cross. We have blunted the offense of this carpenter from Nazareth. We have settled for a feel good Christian Pew theology that kowtows to the hearers in the audience. I made up my mind in November of 1995 when I got ordained that God so help me, I'm going to preach the word of God, if it is just to two people or twenty thousand.

I want to preach the whole Council of God and here Jesus Christ in his farewell sermon talks about hell and the coming judgment. Admittedly friends, these words of Jesus in our text again are controversial. You can read this text and come away with a sense of: my salvation is based

on works. Jesus makes it seem that the line of demarcation, that's what gets me into the kingdom or what causes me to stay out of the kingdom is whether or not I have performed works.

One of the things that Dr. Russell taught me was that you never build a doctrine merely from one passage of scripture, but that you take your findings from a passage of scripture and you relate it to the whole. And one of the things that we come away from Biola is that as we study the scriptures, we understand that as it relates to our salvation, that we are saved by grace, through faith.

We see this in Genesis Chapter 15, verse six, when it said of Abraham that Abraham believed God and it was counted on to him as righteousness. Abraham didn't go to church X amount of times. He didn't look a certain way. He didn't dress a certain way. He merely believed God. And it was counted on to him as righteousness. What is interesting about that is that in Genesis Chapter 17, Abraham is circumcised so that even under the Old Testament paradigm, faith precedes works.

This point is driven home in the Exodus account that night in which the children of Israel were to leave Egypt. God gave these instructions: Then they were to take the blood of of a perfect, spotless lamb and placed it over the doorposts of their homes. When the angel saw the blood of the spotless lamb, he would pass over their homes. That, then, is a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ in the new covenant that Jesus Christ being the spotless lamb. When his blood has been applied to the doorpost of our hearts, we are now made righteous in the eyes of God. Here now the words

of Paul, the great defender of salvation by grace, through faith, when he says in Ephesians Chapter two for his by grace you have been saved, not of words, lest any man should boast.

So what then does this passage mean? Friends? At the end of the day, salvation is a mystery. Not everybody talking about heaven is going. We know this from Matthew, Chapter 7. When Jesus says to a group of religious people, fellows, I can't let you in, they said, Now, why not? Jesus, did we cast out demons in your name? Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we do great things in your name?

And Jesus says, yes, you did all that stuff, but I never knew you. The great tragedy of hell will be friends is that it will be filled with some occupant's who grew up in the church, who went to the Christian colleges and universities. To preach in pulpits to minister to other people, but while they did these things of Christ, Christ said, I never knew you as my great theologian, my grandmother used to say not everybody talking about heaven is going C.S. Lewis said it this way, that the great paradox of heaven is when we will get there. On one hand, we will see people there who we knew for sure would not be there. And on the other hand, we will find people who aren't there who we knew for sure would be there. Salvation is a mystery.

So how do I know that I'm saved? In a word: fruit, the way in which I know that when I prayed that prayer at that dinner table in Dallas, Texas, on May 4th, 1977 was genuine and legit, is that Christ, by his spirit, has transformed my life that I knew that I bear fruit. Listen to me, Biodome. And one of the fruits of a transformed life is that now we have a community of faith who actively engages in the less fortunate, the poor, the disenfranchised.

That's one of the ways, as one scholar put it, that this passage is concerned not with the route of salvation, but with the fruits of salvation. Let me say that again. Our passage is concerned not with the route of salvation, but with the fruit of salvation. Here, then, is Jesus's central theme. Whether or not and how you engage the less fortunate is a profound commentary on your relationship with God. Whether or not or how you engage the less fortunate is a profound commentary on your relationship with God, if you have no heart, no compassion and no works towards the less fortunate, according to Matthew 25, controversial, you have no solid biblical assurance of the presence and practice of the spirit in your life.

What is it going to take, Brian, for me to not just be a passive Christian, what is it going to take for me to be an individual who engages in the lives of the less fortunate? Two things. I try to come up with three, because good preachers come up with three things. Francis chan will come up with at least three. Two things then let's call it a day.

Number one, an incredible love for God. What is it going to take for me to be an individual who engages in the lives of the less fortunate, Number one, an incredible love for God. Friends, as you read the scriptures, one of the things that you cannot get away from is that through the law, the prophets, the writings, the gospels, the epistles and so on and so forth, one of the things that we see is that God has an incredible heart for the poor.

Listen to the scriptures. Look at them with me in Deuteronomy, chapter 14 verses 28 through 29. God says these words at the end of every three years bring all the times of that years produced

and stored in your towns so that the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied. And so that the Lord, your God may bless you and all the work of your hands.

Deuteronomy 15, 7 through 8. He says this: If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord, your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted - I love this expression - or tight-fisted towards your brother, rather be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs. Tony Evans - I interned with him one summer and he talked about this passage in the middle of his sermon. Here's what he did.

He's speaking to about four or five thousand people. And he said to this primarily African-American church, he says, this: Is anyone here on welfare? No, is anyone here on welfare, he says, can start to slip up, then he says, I don't want to embarrass you, but if you're on welfare, I want you to come down front. How's that for an altar call? The altar is flooded. Tony Evans insists to his church there is no reason why a church of our resources should have anybody here on welfare.

We're going to do something about it, he says. Here's what we're going to do. That day and age in the mid 90s, computers were it! And so he figured if you could get a computer skill, you could get a job. He called a wealthy church in North Dallas, told him what he wanted to do, had them donate a bunch of computers, set up a computer lab, trained these men and women over the next several months. He then called that same wealthy church. Many of them own their own

businesses and says, look, I've got about a hundred individuals who now have computer skills. Can you give them jobs? They said yes, gave them jobs. They got off welfare.

Here's a man who says there's something we can do about the poor, teach them how to fish later on. In Job Chapter 31 Job when he's giving his great defense before God says this. If I have denied the desires of the poor, let the eyes of the widow grow weary. If I have kept bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless, let my arm fall from the shoulder. Hear what God says through the prophets. Amos 5:12. Look at it with me: For I know how many of your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Josiah Chapter 14, the second part of verse 3 says this: for in you The father has found compassion.

Of Jesus when he took the scroll there in the synagogue in Luke Chapter four, he says this of himself, The spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to who? to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to release the oppressed. Matthew 9:36 says this of Jesus: when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Acts chapter two, it was one of the marks of the early church, says this: All the believers were together and had everything in common, selling their possessions and goods, they gave to any one as he had need.

When was the last time you heard a believer say, I'm going to sell my house, take the proceeds and give to the poor? James, chapter one sums it up this way: Religion that God, our father accepts is pure and faultless. Is this. To look after orphans and widows in their distress.

Friends, let me say something that I do not mean to be divisive. It's sad that in the day in which we live. We want to compartmentalize the poor, the helpless, and some of us want to make the dividing line of our Christianity the issue of abortion. Abortion is atrocious, it is horrible. Can I tell you, friends, as equally atrocious and horrible is Lester Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee, where most of the kids in that under-resourced part of town, when they go there, they don't even have the resources to get the books they need to learn. Let's not compartmentalize. Abortion, what they do to the unborn is horrible, but what they do to the born as well is horrible.

The litmus test of my Christianity is not seen in my political agenda of abortion, as Tony Evans says, and I like it. God does not ride the backs of elephants or donkeys. He has not come to take sides. He has come to take over what we need is a revolution of Christians who will combat injustice to both the unborn and to the born. In a part of what that means, Friends, is if we're going to picket against these abortion clinics, we must likewise be willing to stand up and have a movement of Christians who adopt these babies. Let's give total care from the womb to the tomb.

Finally. Two or three people - finally. Don't clap or say amen by the way, you'll startle me, you know, I'm preaching to white audiences, I don't expect it. That's fine [audience laughter]. You'll throw me off. Just be quiet [audience laughter]. Finally. What is it going to take for us to be people who engage the less fortunate one, an incredible heart for God? We cannot claim to love

God who loves the poor if we not ourselves have a heart of compassion for the less fortunate, but secondly, a love for people.

Me, where this passage fits, it fits snugly at the crossroads between the two greatest commandments. Love for God, love for people. In order to understand this. Let's go back to the garden real quickly. It says, That man was created in the image and likeness of God, which means that all of mankind deserves respect and dignity because they have burned into the hard drive of their existence, the very likeness of God. I had this point burned into my heart some years ago as my dad and I were walking down the cold streets of Chicago in the dead of winter.

They're huddled in a little corner with no coat, was a homeless man. Struggling to keep warm, he was begging for money and in my cynical heart, I figured he was trying to scare us. My dad stopped, gave this man some money. We walked on a few paces and there my dad stopped me with tears in his eyes and he said these words, I shall never forget pointing back to that huddled homeless man. He says, Son, that is somebody's child. Someone birthed him. Someone went through labor to bring them into the world. That man is your brother.

And God forgive me. And God forgive us for the passivity and the cynicism and the way we suddenly look down our noses at the people who hold the signs and say, OK, we'll work for food. And. And as I look at the day laborers sometimes and I say, what are they doing here? They're here illegally. And sure, there's some issues, but God forgive me. Do something God says. That homeless man in Watts is your brother. That woman today struggling to figure out how she's going to provide for her kids. Is your sister. And God forgive the church for coming up with

millions of dollars annually to send people overseas and at the same time we drop pennies for those in our own community. Oh, the chances we've had forgive us and you'll forgive me for this statement, but I get back on a plane on Sunday and I don't have to come back. But you'll forgive me for this statement. God forgive us for white flight. Communities changing, it's going downhill. Let's pull out!

We need not go overseas to address these issues, the opportunities right here are astounding. I'd love to even have some of you come to Memphis, Tennessee, to help us Memphis, Tennessee, you know what we're doing right now at our church, the largest African-American cemetery in the mid-south is called Zion Cemetery. There are 22,000 African-Americans who have been buried there. It's been closed for about 30 years now. It's privately owned by the CME church. They cannot afford to keep it up. It's 15 acres of absolute mess. You can't even see most of the tombstones. And there are great granddaughters and other descendants come to try to see their relatives. They can't.

And so I said, we've got to do something about this. So my primarily white church right now, we're spending Saturday afternoons, many of us getting infected by poison oak. We're cutting grass, we're weed eating. We're landscaping because we want to show the city of Memphis that we care. Let me just tell you what's going on in Memphis. As of the 2000 census, Memphis poverty rate of 15.3% ties with Miami for the third highest poverty rate in the country. The per capita income for the city is \$7,830, 20.6% of the population and 17.2% of families are below the poverty line out of the total population. 30% of those under the age of 18 and 15% of those 65 and over are living below the poverty line.

You know what I mean? We talk about the poverty line. We're talking about a level of income below which one cannot afford to purchase all the resources necessary to live. What will you do? What will you do, Father? I've tried to be faithful to the text. When we talk about getting attitude, I hope you cause us to get a righteous attitude about the less fortunate. I confess my own sense of passivity. The devastation in some of these minority communities is atrocious. God, I pray that you release from Biola an army of people who, no matter what they do, they would carve out two hours a week to be a mentor to some young boy or some child who doesn't know their daddy. Help us to include line items in our budgets that allow us to give generously to causes that engage the poor. Causes to fall on our knees and pray for those going through tough times. Give us compassion for the woman standing out on the corner of some major intersection with a cardboard sign in hand that says "will work for food", give us compassion. May we do something. Bless us now as we leave, in Jesus name, Amen. You're dismissed.

[End of Recording].