

**Sermon Title:** The True Test of Character by Ms Tay Liping  
**Sermon Text:** Matthew 25: 31-46

**The ultimate test in life is the test of character. Those who pass the test are called righteous.**

In the passage, the King separates the goats and the sheep. Why? In the agricultural practices of that day, the goats and sheep will graze together, but at night, they are separated; for the goats cannot tolerate the cold as well as the sheep do- for they are very different from each other.

The purpose of pointing out the separation in this story is to emphasize a distinction between the two kinds. It conveys the idea that those who belong to him and those who do not belong to Him are distinctly different. The sheep are separated to the right, and the goats to the left. And the king pronounces the verdict of righteousness to the sheep, based on what they did for the least.

What did they do that counted them as righteous? These things that Jesus commended to them were small things- visiting the sick, feeding the poor, clothing the hungry. Small things done with a heart of mercy. The unrighteousness, however, did not serve the least, and their self-interest ruled their motivations.

The King commended the righteous based on what they did *for him*, and he condemned the unrighteous for what they did not do *for him*. What the righteous did in their acts of mercy were out of a response to what Jesus first did for them.

Although they were saved by faith and not by works, their love in action was the evidence of the saving faith within them.

In Luke 7:47, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." Her love for Jesus expressed through her actions was the evidence of her faith in him.

**The test of character reveals our relationship with Jesus.**

Character, shown through good works, like acts of mercy, is a sign of gratitude to God. (1 John 4:19, Luke 7:47, Matthew 20:28, Galatians 2:20)

We have been saved by grace through faith, not works (Ephesians 2:8-10)

The reward and punishment are about spending eternity with Jesus or away from Him.

**Cultivating character takes effort.**

Character is built through the crucible of suffering, and righteousness is an active, ongoing process, requiring our constant pursuit. (Romans 5:3-4, 1 Timothy 6:11)

Character comes with spiritual formation, which need spiritual disciplines (habits). The path of disciplined grace, where disciplines are practiced- will not directly formulate character growth or change, but will put you in a position to receive God's grace for true transformation.

The discipline of service- particularly the service of hospitality (Matthew 25:35) and the example of fostering.

**Response/Discussion**

1. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) Take time to meditate on the abundant love and saving mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Like the woman with the alabaster jar, are you aware of how much God have forgiven you, and how much He loves you?
  
2. What acts of mercy or service is God challenging you (and your family or cell group) to do in grateful response to His love?
  
3. If you are not already doing so, consider practicing the spiritual disciplines as means of receiving God's transformative grace. (Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*)