

## INTRODUCTION

Well, Christmas is over, and if you're like most Americans, you're thinking about one thing—losing weight after all those holiday parties! In a few days we'll ring in the New Year and people will make their New Year resolutions. Each year the #1 resolution is to lose weight! I came across a funny poem by my favorite poet, Anonymous, and her words might be appropriate for some of us now:

'Twas the month after Christmas, and all through the house,  
Nothing would fit me, not even a blouse.  
The cookies I'd nibbled, the eggnog I'd taste,  
At the holiday parties had gone to my waist.

When I got on the scales there arose such a number!  
When I walked to the store (less a walk than a lumber).  
I'd remember the marvelous meals I'd prepared,  
The gravies and sauces and beef nicely rared.

The cake and the rum balls, the bread and the cheese,  
And the way I'd never said, "No thank you, please."  
As I dressed myself in my husband's old shirt,  
And prepared once again to do battle with dirt.

I said to myself, as I only can,  
"You can't spend a winter disguised as a man!"  
So—away with the last of the sour cream dip,  
Get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and chip.

Every last bit of food that I like must be banished,  
'Till all the additional ounces have vanished.  
I won't have a cookie—not even a lick,  
I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.

I won't have hot biscuits, or corn bread, or pie,  
I'll munch on a carrot and quietly cry.  
I'm hungry, I'm lonesome, and life is a bore,  
But isn't that what January is for?

Unable to giggle, no longer a riot,  
Happy New Year to all and to all a good diet!"

Someone said that a New Year's resolution something that goes in one year and out the other. I like what that great theologian, Jay Leno, said about losing weight: "Now there are more overweight people in America than average-weight people. So overweight people are now average, which means, you have met your New Year's resolution."

As we look toward 2009, I'm starting a new message series called "It's Time to Get Good and M.A.D." MAD is an acrostic for Make a Difference. When most people get mad they lose their temper and do something bad. I'm going to challenge you to get GOOD and mad. It's okay to be GOOD and mad. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26, "In your anger do not sin." That means there are times we should express a righteous indignation toward an injustice that spurs us to do something good! When Jesus saw the merchants in the temple area cheating the people out of their hard-earned money, He got good and mad. He turned over their tables, drove out their livestock and said, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" (Matthew 21:13) He was mad—but he was good and mad.

Over the next few weeks I want to make you mad enough to do something good that will make a difference in someone's life. Here's a preview of this series. Today I want to challenge you to: "Get Good and M.A.D. for Christ's Sake." Next Sunday, January 4, I'll talk about "Get Good and M.A.D. for the Children's Sake." We will also Launch "Hope for 100." This is a challenge to our church to make a difference in the lives of at least 100 abandoned or mistreated children. There are millions of hurting children worldwide who desperately need a family. Several thousand of those children are right here in East Texas. You can make a difference in a child's life through adoption or foster care.

On January 11, I've invited my friend, Pastor Jerome Milton, to come and share his amazing testimony. Jerome grew up in one of the worst orphanages in America and he will tell you how God rescued him and changed his life through one woman who got mad—she made a difference.

On January 18, I will challenge you to get outside the four walls of our church and "Get Good and M.A.D. for our Community's Sake" by linking up with some of the wonderful civic organizations that are already doing good for our community. Sometimes the church almost tries to compete with these groups when we should be joining them in helping hurting people in our community. Then on January 25, which is the Sunday after the Presidential Inauguration, I'll complete this series by talking about "Get Good and M.A.D. for Your Country's Sake."

Jesus Christ was good and MAD because He has made an eternal difference for good in the lives of millions of people. And He taught that each of us should make a difference in the lives of others. Jesus said it hundreds of times in many different ways, but here is one passage of scripture in which He says we should get good and MAD. Let's read some verses from Mark 9. In order to visualize Jesus as He spoke these words, look at verse 33 and you see that Jesus is in Capernaum and the disciples are arguing about who is the greatest. In verse 36 we read,

Mark 9:36-37, 41-42. "He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; ... I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.'"

As I begin this series I want to talk to you about getting good and MAD for Christ's sake. Jesus is both our reason for making a difference as well as the One who empowers us to make a

difference. Without Jesus we can only make a dent, but with His power, we can make a difference. There are three powerful principles we find in the Words of Jesus that can help us get good and Make a Difference in the lives of others.

## **1. OFFERING A CUP OF COLD WATER MEANS SHOWING KINDNESS TO STRANGERS**

Mark's words mention only a cup of water, but in Matthew 10:42 Jesus mentions giving a cup of cold water. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we miss the impact of this phrase, because we have a surplus of water, and if we want chilled water, all we have to do is go to the nearest water cooler. To us, getting water is as simple as going to the nearest tap and turning it on. Compared to other drinks we serve, water is the cheapest, so on the surface this would appear to be a minor act of kindness, which misses the point.

Water was a precious commodity in Jesus' time. It wasn't easy to access. Are there any of you in this room old enough to have lived in or visited a house that didn't have indoor plumbing, and to get water you had to go out to the well? Even in rural America, wells were fairly common because of the ability to drill deeply. But in the time of Jesus, wells were rare. Jesus didn't say to give a cup of room temperature water, but to give a cup of *cold* water. This meant it was water that had been recently drawn from a well.

There was and still is a very strict code of hospitality in the Middle Eastern culture. When a stranger entered a village, he was often thirsty from his journey, so he would go to the local well. It was a breach of etiquette for him to draw water from the well. The well was owned by the villagers, and to take water would have been stealing. The stranger would wait there until one of the villagers came and offered him a drink. If you recall in John 4, Jesus came to Jacob's well, but He didn't draw water. The Samaritan woman didn't offer Him water because women didn't talk to strangers, so Jesus asked her for a drink—then He told her about the Living Water. He was following the hospitality custom of the day.

So when Jesus said we should offer a cup of cold water, He was talking about what we call performing acts of kindness to strangers. In America we often call it "random acts of kindness" but I prefer to call it "intentional acts of kindness," because we do it in the name of Jesus.

The Christian's code of conduct is one of kindness. The Bible says, "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." (1 Thessalonians 5:15) What is kindness? Kindness is simply love with its work clothes on!

This brings us face-to-face with the fundamental question: What is our motive for doing good deeds? Why do we show kindness to others? As followers of Jesus we do it because we are following His example and He has commanded us to do it.

There are non-religious people who argue that you don't really need a faith in God in order to be a good person. During this Christmas season, you might have seen evidence of the American Humanist Association's attempt to debunk the idea that there is a God. They spent \$40,000 on a campaign to put signs on buses in major cities that said, "Why Believe in a God? Just be good

for goodness sake." I have to chuckle at that. They ridicule us for believing in God and they borrow a line from the song "Santa Claus is coming to Town" as their motto! Without a God who tells us what is good and what is bad, we cannot even know what good is. In other words, contrary to what the humanists say, we can't be good for goodness sake!

The Humanists spokesman, Fred Edwards, was interviewed by Bill O'Reilly on November 13. After questioning at length by O'Reilly, Edwards admitted the point of the campaign was not to get people to do good things, but to attract like-minded people who would join the American Humanist Association and pay dues. Bill O'Reilly (who probably doesn't score very high on the gift of mercy category in the spiritual gifts test) said to Fred Edwards, "You'd better HOPE there isn't a God!" To which Edwards said, "I'm not worried."

So without getting into a debate about WHY we do good, let's start with the premise that God is good and He has commanded us to perform good works for Jesus' sake. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Before you and I were even born, God had prepared for us some acts of kindness that we can perform for Jesus' sake. So, start looking for someone—it might even be a stranger—who needs a cup of cold water.

## **2. GOD REWARDS ACTS OF KINDNESS DONE IN JESUS' NAME**

Jesus said whenever we give a cup of cold water in His name, we won't lose our reward. Why didn't Jesus just say, "You'll receive a reward?" Instead He said, "You won't LOSE your reward." I believe it's because there are several scenarios in which you perform an act of kindness in which you DO lose your reward.

For instance, if you only show kindness to those who are kind to you—that doesn't require any grace or power from God. That's just swapping niceties. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours doesn't qualify for a reward. It's when you show kindness to those who haven't shown kindness to you or are in no position to repay your kindness that qualifies for God's reward. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." (Luke 6:35)

Another scenario in which you lose your reward is when you perform an act of kindness and your motivation is to be SEEN doing it by others so they will applaud you. Jesus said the applause of others will be your only reward. In Matthew 6:1-4 Jesus said, "Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding. "When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—'playactors' I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out." (*The Message*)

The third scenario in which you'll lose your reward is if you perform your act of kindness in any other name than the name of Jesus. Jesus said, "Give a cup of cold water in MY name." There may be some of you who perform acts of kindness and you do it quietly and without fanfare, but if the recipient of your kindness finds out who you are, then you are the one who gets the glory. I enjoy performing acts of kindness to strangers, but I always try to say this is done in the name of Jesus. At the risk of losing my reward, I'll tell you that sometimes when I'm in line at a drive through, I'll pay for the people behind me. As I hand over the money I'm often tempted to leave my card because it has the name of our church on it and I think that it might encourage that person to attend church here ... but I always resist that temptation and say, "Just tell them that I do this in the name of Jesus." That's all—not in the name of David Dykes, not in the name of Green Acres Baptist Church—but in the name of Jesus.

I encourage all of you to do your acts of kindness in Jesus' name. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) How can they praise God unless they know your good deed was done in the name of Jesus?

### **3. YOUR KINDNESS CAN MAKE AN ETERNAL DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE**

You can feed a hungry person and you can make a real difference in their life—until they get hungry again. But when you perform that kindness in Jesus' name you can make an eternal difference in their lives. You can tell them that God showed kindness and grace to you when you didn't deserve it, and that's why you show kindness to others.

Don't forget, as Jesus spoke these words He was holding a child in His arms. He said that by giving a cup of cold water in His name we could make a positive difference in someone's life. But He also warned that we have the potential to affect people in a negative way. If we act in a way that hinders children from coming to Jesus, He said we'd be better off at the bottom of the ocean with a two-ton millstone tied around our necks. Our words and actions always influence people—some for good and others for bad.

Jesus demonstrated this truth in Matthew 25 as He talked about two categories of people. He called one group "goats" because when they had the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life, they refused. They looked at hungry people and said, "Get a job." They saw a stranger and turned a cold shoulder. Jesus informed the goats that when they ignored needy people, they were actually ignoring Him. Then Jesus told the goats to go to hell. He said hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, but the goats would fit in there because they acted more like the devil than like Jesus.

The other group Jesus called "sheep." These were the people who showed kindness to others—especially to needy strangers. Then Jesus reveals that when these people were showing kindness to strangers, they were actually showing kindness to Him! Let's read Jesus' own words: "'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 to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:37-40) Then Jesus

said to these people, "Come enjoy the kingdom I've prepared for you." Which group will you be in? The goats had the same opportunity to help needy people that the sheep had, they just refused.

You can make a difference in someone's life—an eternal difference. Chances are you've heard the starfish story before, because it has been circulated widely, there's even a poem version on the cover of the worship folder. But I did some literary research and discovered the original idea came from an essay by American author, Loren Eiseley. The story goes something like this:

Once upon a time, there was a writer who traveled to the seashore to be inspired. Each morning the writer took a stroll along a stretch of beach. One morning he observed a young man doing what appeared to be a dance as he reached down and ran into the surf and moved his arm. The young man repeated the movement several times. As the writer approached him, he realized he wasn't dancing, but that he was picking something up and tossing it into the surf. The writer said, "Good morning! What are you doing?" The young man said, "Do you see all these starfish that have been washed up on the shore? The sun is coming up and the tide is going out. If they don't get back in the water the sun will dry them and they will die. So, I'm picking them up and tossing them into the water." The writer said, "That's nice, but there are many miles of beachfront here and there must be thousands of stranded starfish. You can't make much of a difference." The young man reached down to pick up another starfish. As he tossed it gently into the water he said, "Well, I made a difference for that one."

When the starfish story is told that's usually where it ends, but in this version, the writer returns to his beachfront cottage to resume his writing. But he can't shake the mental image of the young man saving the starfish. He couldn't write a word because he was haunted by the vision of the young man. After a couple of hours of frustration, the writer gives up and finds the young man. Together, they spend the rest of the morning tossing starfish back in the water.

Eiseley's story is a reminder to us that we can either choose to sit by and be an observer of what's happening around us, or we can choose to be active in our world to make a difference. In this parable of life, we learn that each of us has been uniquely created by God so we can make a positive difference in someone's life. We just have to discover our starfish. You might even see someone saving starfish, and join them in making a difference. Over these next few weeks, I'm going to be challenging you to find your starfish and get good and M.A.D.—to Make A Difference.

## CONCLUSION

Abraham Lincoln never joined a church, but he gave evidence of being a thoughtful Christian who read his Bible regularly. By the way, when President Obama is sworn in on January 20, he has chosen to use Abraham Lincoln's personal Bible to take the Oath of Office. Lincoln commented that he hadn't joined a church because the churches of his day had too many long and detailed creeds and codes. He wrote that if he ever found a church whose only creed was the words of Jesus "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, your strength, your soul and your

mind; and to love your neighbor as yourself" that he would join that church in a heartbeat.

While he was President Lincoln attended church almost every Sunday at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, where Dr. Phineas Gurley was the pastor. Lincoln's presence caused such a commotion that Dr. Gurley gave Lincoln a key to his private study just off the platform, and Lincoln would often slip in and listen to the message in the Pastor's study. After one particularly eloquent, moving sermon, Lincoln was leaving and his assistant, John Hay remarked, "Mr. President, wasn't that a great sermon?" Lincoln thought for a moment and said, "It was a good sermon, but it was not a great sermon." His assistant asked, "Why do you say that, Mr. President?" Lincoln said, "Well, the speaker was eloquent and the content was excellent, but it wasn't a great sermon, because Dr. Gurley forgot one important matter. He did not ask us to do something great for God."

You might not think this is a good sermon, or a great sermon, but I AM asking you to do something great for God—to change your behavior and reach out and make a difference in someone's life in 2009. For some of you it may be giving a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, for others, you think you've got all the children you'll ever have, and God has a surprise for you—He is going to call you to do something great—adopt a child in your family who without you could end up a criminal on the streets and die and go to hell, but because you open your arms and your home to that child, they will become a follower of Jesus Christ. For others of you, it's time to get out of your seats, onto your feet, and out into the street and start making a difference in our community or in our country. It's time to get good and M.A.D. will you?

## OUTLINE

### 1. OFFERING A CUP OF COLD WATER MEANS SHOWING KINDNESS TO STRANGERS

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." *1 Thessalonians 5:15*

### 2. GOD REWARDS ACTS OF KINDNESS DONE IN JESUS' NAME

"Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." *Luke 6:35*

### 3. YOUR KINDNESS CAN MAKE AN ETERNAL DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE

"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 to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" *Matthew 25:37-40*





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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes