

“Of Sheep and Goats”

January 28, 2024

Matthew 25:31-46

I. Introduction

Jesus began His teaching on the end time with some of the signs that would indicate that His coming was imminent—wars, famines, earthquakes. He got more particular about the things that would happen during the 7 years of tribulation—increase in wickedness, no love, falling away from faith. Then using several parables, Jesus warned His disciples to be watchful, ready, and faithful. They are also to be prepared and productive as they look forward to His return. In today’s Scripture, Jesus brought His prophesy to a close as He gave promises of reward and warnings of judgment that will accompany His return “when the Son of Man comes in his glory.”

There are several judgments that are going to happen towards the end of time. Turn to 2 Cor. 5:10. This is called the judgment seat of Christ or the Bema seat. Here resurrected and raptured believers in heaven will be judged for their works. Sin is not in view at this judgment, as that was paid for by Christ, but only faithfulness in Christian service. As we read last week in 1 Cor. 3:10-15, at this judgment, each Christian’s works will be judged. Selfish works or those done with wrong motives will be burned up, i.e., the “wood, hay, and straw.” But works of lasting value to the Lord, i.e., “gold, silver, and precious stones” will survive and will be rewarded Now turn to Revelation 20:7-15. Verse 7 says that this judgment will take place after the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth. As verse 11 indicates, this judgment, called the “Great White Throne Judgment,” takes place in space somewhere—the “earth and sky have fled.”

Since the judgment described by Jesus in Matthew 25 takes place at the end of the Tribulation and before the 1000-year reign, this is a different judgment. This judgment not only will determine the ultimate eternal destines of everyone on earth at the end of the Tribulation, but it will also determine who will and who will not enter the Millennium kingdom. Jesus’ description of this particular judgment began with some background.

II. The Background

A. The judge First, there is the judge—“the Son of Man.” This was the most common title Jesus used for Himself. It emphasized His identity with mankind, His humbleness, His humiliation and suffering, His love for fallen humanity. But one day this meek and mild Son of Man will return as the glorious, sovereign, reigning, and judging King of kings and Lord of lords. He will reign over the earth for 1,000 years, but His first act as King will be to decide who enters His millennial, earthly kingdom and who does not.

B. The time Jesus has said, “No one knows about that day or hour” when the Tribulation and His return will occur, but at the end of the Tribulation, He will come “with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). And just as in the parable of the 10 virgins, when the Bridegroom comes, the door will be shut. When Jesus comes to the earth in glory at the end of the Tribulation, there will be no more opportunity for unbelievers who are living at that time to receive Jesus as Messiah—their Lord and Savior—the door will be shut.

Jesus said that when He appears, He will be accompanied by “all the angels with Him.”

Colossians 3:4 adds, “When Christ who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” From these and other Scriptures, it would seem that the Old Testament saints, Christians who have died, Christians who will have been raptured, and Christians who will have been martyred during the Tribulation will all accompany Christ and His angels and join the Christians still living at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus descends to earth to establish His millennial kingdom.

C. The place The place of Jesus’ judgment will be the earth, where He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. Turn to Luke 1:29-33. Zechariah 14:4 says, “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.” David’s throne was in Jerusalem, and that is where Jesus’ throne will be. As the angel said in Acts 1:11, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” This time though He will come in power and glory as He reigns in Jerusalem.

D. Those to be judged There's the judge, the time, the place and now there's those to be judged. Jesus said that “all nations will be gathered before him”—all those living when He returns will appear before Him. In the story of the sheep and the goats, Jesus made it clear that when He returns those who are alive on earth will include saved and unsaved. These are the ones to be judged—those alive on the earth.

III. The Judgment

After setting the background or the scene, Jesus told the disciples about the coming judgment. It will be a complete and absolute separation of the sheep from the goats; the saved from the unsaved. The believing sheep—those “who are blessed by my Father”—He will put on His right, the place of honor and blessing; the unbelieving goats He will put on the left—by comparison, a place of dishonor and rejection.

A. The Reward of the Sheep First, Jesus described the reward of the sheep—the saved. Those believers in Christ who have survived the horrible Tribulation will be ushered alive into the millennial kingdom—“the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Notice that they didn’t earn this position or place, it was an inheritance. A person does not earn an inheritance but receives it on the basis of being part of a family. It has nothing to do with what he or she has “done.” The same is true here for believers.

Romans 8:17 says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”

When one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he is adopted into the family of God on equal footing with Jesus and receives an inheritance as a child of God.

The good deeds commended by the King are the fruit and not the basis of salvation. Turn to Ephesians 2:8-10. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” The only way to be saved is by faith—faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No amount of good works can save a person. Turn to Matt. 7:21-23. Doing good deeds is the right—the correct—thing for believers to do, but it is not the way unbelievers can be saved.

Jesus listed 6 examples of areas of need: being hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison.

The kingdom is for those who have ministered to such needs in the lives of God's people—Jesus' brothers.

These good deeds deal with common everyday needs. There is no mention of huge undertakings or spectacular accomplishments but only regular, day-to-day kindnesses that help meet the needs of fellow believers. This is the evidence of true salvation--a life marked by the compassion of God and the meekness and love of Christ in everyday life. [Hebrews 13:16](#) says, "**Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.**"

The interesting thing about this judgment is that the "sheep" individuals are surprised at what they hear. They don't remember having seen the Lord Jesus Christ and ministering to His needs. But in [Matthew 10:40](#) Jesus told His disciples, "**He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.**" Whatever believers do for each other, they also do for their Lord Jesus Christ, and the person who genuinely receives and serves Christians in Christ's name demonstrates that he is a Christian—today as well as during the Tribulation. The self-giving service of Christians to each other in Christ's name is a key external mark that identifies them as God's people. In [John 13:35](#) Jesus said, "**By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**"

The response of those whom the King commands is remarkable and is, also, another proof of their salvation. They didn't minister to get the applause of men or to be rewarded by God. They had ministered in humility and selflessness and not to be seen or honored by others. They appear to have forgotten all about the many things they had done and were surprised that these were worthy of even being mentioned by the Lord.

It is this practical demonstration of love that Christ the King will call attention to as He welcomes the Tribulation saints into His millennial kingdom. Believers during those 7 years and especially during the last 3 1/2 years will have great need for the basics. Because of their identity with Christ, they will often be hungry, thirsty, without a roof over their heads. They will need clothing. Because of their mistreatment,

they will be sick, imprisoned and alienated from the rest of society. Most likely, those who will meet the needs of fellow believers will not do it out of their abundance, but out of their small resources. Most believers will barely be able to meet their own needs let alone someone else's. The divinely inspired generosity of Christian to Christian will set these people apart as one of God's people even before Jesus points them out.

B. The punishment of the goats Following the reward of the sheep, there is the punishment of the goats—the sentence of the unsaved. To the unsaved on His left, the King will say, “**Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**” Notice that hell was not prepared for the goats, i.e., the unsaved, it was prepared for the devil and his angels. But if sinners listen to Satan, and follow his ways, they will end up where he will end up—in the torments of hell.

Just like the sheep weren't saved because of the works that they did, the goats aren't cursed because of failing to serve Christ. The sheep were saved because they chose to make Jesus their Lord and Savior; the goats are unsaved because they rejected Christ as their Lord and Savior. **John 3:36** says, “**Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.**”

The evidence that those on the left never belonged to Christ, especially those who lived in the Tribulation, will be that they did not love and serve His people. Their response to believers' needs will have been just the opposite of those who enter the kingdom. When they refused the needs of Christ's people, they refused to minister to Christ. And by doing so, they proved they didn't belong to Him.

The marks of lostness that Jesus mentions here are not gross sins committed—like those listed in **Romans 1**—but rather simple acts of kindness that were **not** done. As we read last week in **James 4:17**, “**Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.**” The 5 foolish virgins who had no oil for their lamps were not shut out of the wedding feast because they were wicked, but because they were unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom. The servant with one talent was not cast into outer darkness because he had in some way lost His master's money, but because he failed to invest it. In the same

way a person who is shut out of the kingdom of God is not condemned because of the greatness of his sins but because of the absence of his faith. Those who are condemned to hell aren't condemned because of their vile sins, but because of their lack of faith in Jesus Christ. [2 Thessalonians 2:12](#) says, “**All will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.**”

In [verse 46](#) Jesus used the same word “**eternal**” to describe salvation and condemnation. If believers will be in heaven with God forever, the lost will be in hell with the devil forever. There are only 2 eternal destinies—eternal punishment for those who reject Christ or eternal life for those who trust Him. In [Matt. 12:30](#) Jesus said, “**He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.**”

IV. Conclusion

There is much debate about the timing of the Rapture and other events concerning the Tribulation, but the important point made throughout these verses is clear: judgment will come. We are all accountable for what we do in this life while we await the return of the King. If one is a member of God’s kingdom, there should be—there must be—evidence in transformed speech and thoughts and actions and character of a person’s life. But if there isn’t any change in how a person lives compared to the rest of the world, then the evidence indicates that that person isn’t a member of the kingdom of God. [Turn to Titus 3:1-5.](#)

What do your life and actions say about you? Who is Lord of your life? *If you were brought before a court of law, would there be enough evidence from your life to prove that you are a Christian?* Are you one of the sheep or one of the goats? What do your actions say about your heart? You may fool those around you, but you can’t fool God. [2 Chron. 28:9](#) says, “**For the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.**” We must be ready to meet our Lord and Savior whether at the end of life or at the end of this age. Each person will have to give an account for what he has done with his life, *Live as though Jesus is coming back today; plan as though He is not coming back for a hundred years.*