

Matthew 25:31-46

Announcements:

- Sept 14th (two weeks) - Israel Sunday (Todd Q & A) **(no missions)** and Oct 7th Documentary. Warning about graphic material (**show trailer**) highly encourage the church...
- **Pray** for Israel (peace of Jerusalem) and for demonic attacks on churches and school

Please open to **Matthew Chapter 25** (Need a Bible? Raise your hand...)

- **Finishing** the **Olivet Discourse** today! (eschatology break - starting **Colossians** next!)
- Last time: Parable of the talents. The master went away and came back. Settled accounts
- This time: Parable of the Sheep & Goats. A judgment that happens at Christ's return.

Message Title: Sorting the Nations

- The Glorious Throne (verses 31-33)
- The Blessed Sheep (verses 34-40)
- The Cursed Goats (verses 41-45)
- The Eternal Outcome (verses 34, 41, 46)

When Christ returns, he will **expose realities** and **sort out all the people from all the nations**.

- **Evil** will be dealt with and punished (currently, much is hidden and much is praised/promoted)
- **Righteousness** will be revealed and rewarded (currently, much is forgotten or distained)

The Glorious Throne (verses 31-33)

I should start by saying, this is **technically not a parable** in the sense that the last two were. We don't see the Greek language ("like") that typically indicates the signaling of a parable. However, **based on a reading of the text**, it is clear Jesus is using "illustrative language of sheep and goats" as **a picture**.

- But this one starts with **a matter of fact**...

V. 31 - When the Son of Man comes (appears)

- **"When"** not **"if"** (we just don't know when, exactly...)
- **"Son of Man"** - an official title from the **Book of Daniel**. **Claiming = Messiah!** (God | Man)
- **"Appears!"** That's been the **main point of close to 75%** of the entire Olivet Discourse.
- **Essential Christian Doctrine**. I reject any theology that teaches Christ has already or is not returning. This is a future event that will come. **I believe sooner than later (VERY SOON)**.

V. 31 - In His glory

- **Shocking**, considering the **"timing"** of this sermon (just 2-3 days before death and burial)
 - **Glory (doxa)** = Honor and admiration... something beautiful and impressive...
 - **Huh?** What glory is there in worshiping a dead and despised man?
- Yet, this is what makes it all so epic! Christ, is both the **Lamb and the Lion**
- Christ came the first time as **the sacrificial lamb** (and we **"beheld His glory"**, but not like this)
 - **First Advent** = **Obscure** = small manger in a small town. Local. A few shepherds/magi
 - Unexpected, unwanted, unnoticed (no form)... (poor family, no palace or throne)
 - **Mt. of Transfiguration** - got a peek (sneak preview!), but still veiled... (family/disciples)
 - And then he **died like a seed going into the ground...** (**which brings new life!**)

- HUMILITY

- Christ comes again as **the roaring lion** (from the tribe of Judah), and will come in the **fullness of His visible glory!** (King of kings and Lord of lords). **Lighting across the sky!**
 - This is **justice & vindication**. He who was *despised, rejected, ridiculed, and crucified* will be **high and lifted up (exalted) as judge of all the earth...**
 - **GLORY!** (Zech 14:4 - His feet will stand on the **Mount of Olives** (same place!))

V. 31 - Then He will Sit on the throne of His glory (His glorious throne!)

- **Then** = **upon (immediately after)** His **appearing**.
- This is a picture of **sovereign control** and it is a **posture of authority & judgment**
 - And there are **no other ways**. No one else is **seated on the throne** (not Buddha, nor the pope, nor Mohammed, now Moses, nor **any other name under heaven**) (Jn 14:6)
 - **To Christ & Christ alone** - **every knee will bow and every tongue will confess**
- The **timing, location and participants** all seem to point to this judgment being **separate from that of the Great White Throne Judgment**
 - **Timing** - at **Christ's Return** (before not after **the Millennium** w/ *heaven & earth fleeing*)
 - **Location** - **Earth not Heaven** (judging criteria different - *tribulation* vs *books opened?*)
 - **Participants** - Both: (*sheep/goats*) (**living** nations vs **final resurrection** of the dead)
 - **I believe separate**, though *it is possible* they are somehow *referring to the same event*.

V. 31 - And all the angels with Him

- We learned from *a few places in Matthews account* - they are the **"gatherers and reapers"**
- Now all of this is **a coming future fulfillment** of **Daniel Chapter 7**
- **Daniel 7:9-10** - "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated... a thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. **The court was seated, and the books were opened.**" (**courtroom setting!**)
- What a **glorious and powerful sight** this will be. **Revelation 19** speaks of the same event.
- **Picture the scene:** Christ, in the **fullness of His glory**. *Eyes of fire; millions of angels; the Lion seated on the throne; and out of his mouth a sharp sword that will strike the nations*. Gathered in front of this awesome scene is *millions upon millions (a sea) of people...*

V. 32 - All the nations will be gathered before Him

- **Ethnos** = a multitude, company, tribe, nation, or people group (ethnicity). Gentiles, pagans, all of humanity. **Leave us with some interpreting!**
 - **Nations:** Mexico, Cambodia, Turkey, Tonga, Congo, China, Chile, Slovakia, Slovenia
 - **Ethnicities:** (cultures, people groups) White, black, and all shades in between?
 - **Gentiles:** (Christian or pagan) - **separated from Israel** (often in the Scriptures...)
 - More on this thought in a moment...
 - **All of humanity:** (living and dead)
- It's **hard to be dogmatic**, but *at minimum* we're dealing with *all the "Gentiles" alive (time is fulfilled) at Christ's return (including the church (rapture))*, but it's **possible it's even broader**.
- *How many of these "nations"?* **ALL (no exceptions, exemptions, or escaping...)**
- *Some* even connect this to **the Bema Seat** - **Jesus sorts and rewards**. *Later white throne...*
- **Let the nations rage if they will (psalm 2)**, but our Lord **Jesus will get the last word**.

V. 32 - And He will separate them one from another

- **He will separate** = **not us**. **He will** (parables of: **wheat and tares / dragnet** = “harvest” time)
- **Divide/separate** = **To mark off by boundaries. To appoint and exclude.**
 - Some are **gathered**, some are **separated**... C. S. Lewis called it “**the Great Divorce**”
- **From one another** - even though He’s with “**nations**” - the **Greek shifts to: individualistic.**
 - further considering the **Parables** of the **Bridesmaids/Talents** have the **same point**.
 - **From among all the people groups of this world, Christ will sort out who are His, on an individualistic basis...**

V. 32 - As a shepherd divides his **sheep from the goats**

- **Sheep and goats. Common animals** to Israel. Both used in **sacrificial worship** and **daily life**.
 - Not common to you and I, although **fairly common in Texas ranch life (any of you?)**
 - **Sheep and goats** can **both be stubborn** at times...
 - But, **sheep** are known more for **flocking and following** other sheep,
 - Whereas **goats** are generally more **stubborn and headstrong**.
 - **Goats** can tend to **nip at people** more and are more likely to **charge you (one of my kids!)**
 - *I heard a story of one man in Illinois, when he saw his neighbor with a flock of goats, he would **cross the road to the other side** when he saw them coming...*
- Just as **a farmer knows** the character and nature of his animals, **so does Christ** know the **nations**. And the truth is, **we all need Grace to even be one of His sheep**.
- **Isaiah 53:6-7** - “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before its shearers is silent, He opened not His mouth*” (**substitutionary atonement**)
 - We must **repent and accept** this truth to even be born again and **found in His sheepfold**.

V. 33 - And He will set the **sheep on His right hand**, but the **goats on the left**.

- Just as **ancient shepherds would separate** the **sheep and goats** before their **resting places at night time**, this **normal shepherding task** now becomes **an eternal metaphor!** (**not literal, ha!**)
- Currently, you and I are **not able to distinguish the crowd (all intermingled)**, but **when the judgment begins**, the King speaks up... (**HE**) is the one who does the **separating of the people**.
 - **Cultural/historical views** of “**right**” vs **left**”
 - **Sheep** are **honor/dignity (Right)**
 - **Goats** are **disgrace/shame (Left)**
- **No neutral territory. No purgatory. No third option.**
 - **Two roads. Two destinations.**

The scene is set:

- **The throne will be established.**
- **The King will take his seat.**
- **The angels will gather all the people.**
- **The Judgment of the Nations will begin.**

The Blessed Sheep (verses 34-40)

Here, we come to the part of the story where **evidence** for *sheep/goats* is being *introduced to the courtroom*. And, it's **somewhat unexpected**. You don't hear any of our *typical soteriology language*: *faith, grace, salvation, being born again*; or *typical Christian practices*: *prayer, worship, tithing, etc.*

- The *language of this parable* is all based on how you **"treat others"** (*efforts/works*)
- But we know that **salvation** is **"NOT BY WORKS, lest any man should boast"** (Eph. 2:9)
- In the **OT**, Abraham's *faith was credited to Him as righteousness*.
- In the **NT**, it is *by grace, through faith*.
- But we *talked last Sunday*, that a person's faith **WILL BE EVIDENCED** by *works* (James 2)
- And **works are extremely important and vital** to the Christian life (*no works, not sure...*)
- Not just *"say"* you are a Christian, but *"live"* like one. *"Being not only a hearer, but a doer!"*
- That's *what we're seeing* here...

In context, it all makes perfect sense (*three parables about "being ready" for Christ's return*):

- *Ten Bridesmaids* = **Vigilance (Hope)**
- *Parable of the Talents* = **Diligence (Faith)**
- *Sheep and Goats* = **Benevolence (Love)**
- ****No one passage or parable contains the WHOLE theological system of truth****
- Matthew is **not trying to give us a concrete definition** of saving faith. Not *"exactly how"* does one *inherit the kingdom*, but *"what does a 'good sheep' look like?"*
- It looks like: *A woman reaching out in faith, a Roman centurion asking, a child simply trusting, a slave prudently working, and a compassionate neighbor helping a landing hand...*
- But we also know that **even some of that is not enough to save**. For **even a heathen can help another human** in time of need *without any faith in Christ at all*. There are plenty of *"secular humanitarian workers"* out there. So **this is something far richer and deeper...**

V. 34 - **Then** = At the *time of Christ's appearing*...

V. 34 - **The King will say to those on His right hand**

- We're dealing with the *blessed sheep* that are part of God's *kingdom of heaven*.

V. 34 - **Come, you blessed of My Father**

- A **personal invitation** from the *King of Glory Himself!* (*well done, good and faithful!*)
- **Blessed** speaks of *divine favor*. *Eulogeo* = *praises, prosperings, favor and celebration*
- *In Matthew's Gospel*, a major concept of **blessedness** goes all the way back to the B-Attitudes.
- The *poor in spirit, merciful, meek, hungry and thirsty* are the ones who *"inherit the kingdom of heaven"* - it's **not just an outward show** of *works*, it's also an **inward heart attitude** (*faith*)
- The **blessed of the Father** are the *truly Born Again ones*.

V. 34 - **Inherit the kingdom**

- *Not earned*, but *inherited*. *"the spirit of adoption"* (Romans 8) (*family, not wages*)
- *Daniel 7:18* - *"The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."*

V. 34 - **Prepared for you from the foundation (creation) of the world**

- Part of **God's eternal plan**. He was not *shocked or thrown off* when *Eve ate the fruit*...
- God's kingdom for God's people was *no afterthought*... **From Garden to Garden!**

- **But, in the meantime...**

Vv. 35-36 - "Hungry (food), thirsty (drink), stranger (home), naked (clothes), sick (helped), prison (visited)"

- **Six items** - not meant to be turned into a **"formula or ritual"** but to give **a picture of mercy!**
- The list is **not meant to be exhaustive**, but **illustrative!** (go and do *likewise, similar, or more!*)
- **Caring for those in need** is a **logical outworking** of the **believer's** faith (*or should be at least!*)

V. 37 - Then **the righteous** will answer, '**Lord, when** did we see You...' (see list (vv. 38-39))

- This is **one indicator** we know salvation is **not by "works"** - the people would **not have been surprised** by the words of Jesus, they would have been like, **"yeah we know, that's why we did it"**
- Jesus is getting at **something more** than **just salvation** in this sermon. *Let's look at His answer:*

V. 40 - **Assuredly**, I say to you

- **Pre-Amen** = **take it to the bank!**

V. 40 - Inasmuch as you did it to one of **the least of these My brethren** (brothers and sisters)

- **My Brethren & Least of these** = Has caused some **theological ideas and questions**.
- **Least of these (elachistos)** = "smallest in: size, amount, importance, authority, or ranks"
- **Brethren (Adelphos)** = "born of the same parents, sharing ancestry, a fellow believer, a close associate, any fellow or man" - **That's a wide range to interpret both of these words!**
- **Main Interpretations of V. 40** (all on one slide)
 - **(1) All people struggling in the world**
 - **(2) Christians (brothers and sisters)** ("prison" often refers to Christians in the NT)
 - **Traveling disciples/persecuted saints/missionaries.**
 - **(3) Israel as a people/nation (especially during the tribulation period (not "ethnos"))**
 - **Yad Vashem (Jerusalem's Holocaust Memorial).**
 - **Planted Trees = "the avenue of righteous gentiles" (Gentiles/Jews/Nazis)**
- I would argue **all three are important and true!** (God cares about all three (and scripture))
 - **Prov. 19:17, CSB** - **"Kindness to the poor is a loan to the Lord, and he will give a reward to the lender..."**
 - **Gal. 6:10** - **"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."** (**Brethren** almost always used of **Christ followers**)
 - **End of Matthew 12** - **"Whoever does the will of My Father" (if so, serve!)**
 - **Genesis 12:2** - **"I will make you a great nation... I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** (even more so during the **time of Jacob's trouble**)
- **My conclusion:** It would **not be good (practically)** to narrow it down, but instead **do all three**.
 - With a **special emphasis** on **GOD'S PEOPLE: Jews and Christians (2 Cor 11:22-28)**
 - I have **no problem with it being both Prophetic (Tribulation) and Practical (Now!)**
- And, it's because of this **verse (25:40)** almost more than any other, there are incredible **humanitarian efforts in the name of Christ**. *Adoptions, prison visits, pregnancy resource centers, homeless shelters, Salvation Army, World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, Compassion International, Mercy Ships, Food for the Hungry, Convoy of Hope, OUR, ORR, the list goes on and on... (some of you here in this church!)*
 - But **not just secularism humanitarianism** (i.e. *peace corps* or *red cross*). **No!**

- It's from Christ, with Christ, and unto Christ, It's **Christ-Centered!**
- Do you love Jesus? Then worship and pray, of course... But here is **another way you love Jesus**, through benevolence, mercy, and acts of kindness...
- Mother Teresa serving in the slums of Calcutta said, "I see Jesus in every person I serve." She wasn't trying to earn salvation but **expressing it**.

V. 40 - You **did it to Me**

- The language "I was hungry" (v. 42) and "I was a stranger" (v. 43) coming from **our Lord of the universe** is hard to grasp. **Incarnation?** yes. But here something even **broader & mysterious**.
 - **All people** are made in the image of God, so there is a sense in which **He is with them**.
 - Even more so that is true of true **Israel and the church**. He resides within His people!
 - When you help them, Christ says, "it is as if you are helping me"
 - We get that from a "**familial**" or "**cultural group**" perspective.
 - Do good to my wife and kids, it is like you have served me...
 - But the converse is also true. Hurt them, and you've hurt me...
- King Abdullah II of Jordan (since 1999) would sometimes **disguise himself** by wearing old clothes to go out in public (like an episode of undercover boss!) **Christ = something similar**
- Acts 9:3-5 - "As [Saul] journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"
- Jesus **identifies Himself** with the hurting, needy people of this world. As a "man of sorrows," **He is close to them**. Even more so if they know Him and are "**His people**" by faith.

The Cursed Goats (verses 41-45)

In this section, we don't need to be too repetitive. *Much of this has already been said*, just in the **opposite fashion**. **Woo'ing... Woe'ing (Warning)...**

V. 41 - To those on the left hand

- Dealing with the goats now...

V. 41 - Depart from Me, you cursed (ones)

- **Parallelism alert!** Come vs depart. Blessed vs cursed.
 - Same judge. Same opportunities. Opposite verdict.
- "Depart from me" - some of the **most frightening words** ever spoken (*no second chance*)

V. 41 - Into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels

- Will save this for the **last section**...

Vv. 42-43 = **Negation to all six scenarios**

V. 44 - Then they also will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You...' (see list (v. 44))

- **All have to give an account**. All must **"answer Him"**
- When did we... **self-deceived by cheap grace**.

V. 45 - Then **He will answer** them, '**Assuredly**, I say to you'

- **Pre-Amen** = take it to the bank!

V. 45 - Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, **you did not do it to Me**

- Here, the issue is that of indifference. It's a **sin of Omission** (James 4:17)
- That to **"withhold good"** is a **moral equivalent** of **"doing evil"**
- This is **best illustrated** in the **Parable of the Good Samaritan** (Luke 10).
 - **Neighbor?** A hurting person. Priest and Levite **failed to act**. Samaritan = compassion
- Jesus is saying to **neglect others in need of help**, is to **neglect Him!**
 - **How we treat others reveals our relationship with God...**
- **1 John 3:16-19** - "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And **we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him."
 - **Acts of Mercy**, is a **test of evidence**.

The Eternal Outcome (verses 34, 41, 46)

Verse 46 makes the **same point** that Jesus has been making for **many illustrations** now.

- Two groups of people with two destinations. **Heaven or hell**.
- And both here in this one verse are listed as "eternal."
- **Eternal (aionios)** = *that which has always been, with end, never to cease, everlasting*.
 - The **goats** go to **hell**. The **sheep** go to **heaven**. **Very clear**.
 - This shuts down **two false theologies**: **Universalism** and **Annihilationism** (explain)

If the **righteous experience life forever**, we must say the **guilty experience punishment forever**.

The **Bible is so very clear** on this subject. There are **two roads**, with **two eternal destinations**:

- (1) The **"goats"** will go to **everlasting punishment** (Def: torment, retribution)
 - o **Pictured** a few different ways:
 - o **A pit; a prison, outer darkness; weeping & gnashing of teeth; everlasting fire (v. 41)**
 - o Here, Jesus makes it clear, this was a place **originally meant** for **"the devil and his angels" (v. 41)** *This is no eternal "party" as the world mockingly thinks of it... (I did)*
 - (i) **God never wanted to send anyone here**.
 - (ii) There's **no Bible verse** that says **God predestines people to hell**.
 - (iii) God **"takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked"** (Ezekiel 33:11)
 - (iv) He **"desires the NONE would perish but that ALL would come to a place of repentance"** (2 Peter 3:9) - *If it breaks His heart, it should break ours too.*
 - o I came across a story of **a group of soldiers on a ship** once asked **the chaplain**, **"Do you believe in hell?"** "No, why?" "Well, then will you please resign? For if there is no hell, then we do not need you; and if there is, **we do not wish to be led astray.**"
- (2) The **"sheep"** will go to **eternal life**.
 - o **In verse 34**, Jesus equates this to those who are **"Blessed of the Father"** and will **"inherit the kingdom"** that has been **"prepared for them"**

- (i) *Marriage Supper, Father's House, Eternal life, Kingdom of Heaven, everlasting inheritance. Millennial Kingdom all the way to the new heavens and the new earth (new Jerusalem) = Paradise!*

Closing:

There's a **firm finality** to all of this language in the **Olivet Discourse**.

Christ is going to return. And, **When Christ returns**.

A judgment of **all the "ethnos"** occurs. For the *righteous* and *unrighteous*.

- Based on the **truths of our salvation**.
- *Did we just "say" we knew Christ?*
- *Or did we "actually know Him" and "live" for Him as if that's true?*

Our closing passage reveals that **genuine saving faith inevitably produces** *compassionate action*.

- *Reflect on your life... Take all of this seriously...*
- For the **sheep**, the return of Christ is your **blessed hope**.
- For the **goats**, the return of Christ is your **eternal regret**.

(leave off if out of time)

2 Thess 1:7-10 - "...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed!"

G.O.S.P.E.L

- **ALTAR CALL?**

PRAY