



Matthew 25 – Parable of the Sheep and the Goats

After his dissertation of end time events, including His Second Coming, Jesus in Matthew 25 gives three parables to highlight characteristics of people alive and events concurrent with the future seven-year tribulation. Last week we looked at the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents. Each was a clarion call (primarily to Jews) to watch and wait for the return of

the Messiah and be prepared for that coming. The final parable in the eschatology of Matthew is the parable of the sheep and the goats. The text provides the setting ... from which there are a few ancillary issues to discuss ...

³¹ "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Jesus first tells us that He is coming as the Son of Man, which we understand is the Son of Man from Daniel 7. The entire verse is set up as a sequence ... "but when ... then ..." 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory' is a depiction of the splendor that will be His Second Coming. Glory is a usual depiction of a bright splendorous light that is representative of great honor and holiness. There are several places where Jesus uses this description of His coming. For example, back in Matthew 16 Jesus tells us that the "Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father, with His angels ..." He tells us here that the glory that will be on display at the Second Coming will be His Father's glory, certainly shining through Him and on display through His resurrected body (John 17:5 may hint at this). It is certainly very interesting that Jesus spoke these words just before the account of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17. Recall that "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." The parallel account in Luke 9 says the disciples saw His glory and offered to build three tabernacles. Now many think the sight of the glory here was too much for the disciples and they responded in an incoherent way. But what the disciples saw no doubt reminded them of the OT tabernacle that Moses commanded to be built that would house God's glory when He spoke to Moses and that would fill the holy of holies on the once-a-year day of atonement. I think this was a perfectly rational suggestion that Peter and his companions made. They wanted to protect the *Shekinah*¹ glory of God that was obviously on display here. This is what "every eye will see" on that day. The immense Shekinah glory of the Lord will be visible to everyone.

Notice also that the angels will accompany Jesus at His second coming. Jesus taught that the angels have at least two distinct roles at the Second Coming. First, recall from Matthew 13:41 the angels will be responsible for removing unbelievers from the earth at the Second Coming. This is their first purpose. Second, the angels will gather the elect Jews from around the world back to the land of Israel for the Messianic age (Matt. 24:31). That is their second purpose.

The last item in this verse that occurs is ... Jesus will 'sit on His glorious throne.' What throne is He talking about? Luke gives us more detail in the story of Jesus' birth. In that account, Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus

Luke 1³² 'He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.'

What kingdom is meant here? I submit that since there can only be one forever kingdom, and a forever kingdom is also referenced in Daniel (and Gabriel gave details of how that will come about), and the Gentile kingdoms in Daniel were visible, earthly kingdoms ... this throne on which Jesus will sit is an earthly throne in which Christ will administer the rule of David predicted in the OT. Recall God intended for the nation of Israel to have the primary rule over earth; but because of their disobedience, that Davidic rule was removed from Israel and the rule of the world would be administered by four Gentile kingdoms for the rest of the present age. Now there are many well-meaning Christians that believe Jesus is currently sitting on His throne in heaven (Progressive Dispensationalists) ... and in some way is already reigning on David's throne. Let me show you the one passage that refutes that claim most directly; it is Rev. 3:21. In the first few chapters of Revelation, Jesus is giving message to the seven churches in existence in Asia Minor around 95 AD. His message to the last church, the church of Laodicea, includes the following reward ...

²¹ 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.'

Notice what Jesus says. I will grant, literally 'I shall give (δώσω – future active of δίδωμι to grant, give) to sit (aorist infinitive)' on His throne. Where is His throne? On earth, the text in Matthew tells us that. Where is Jesus sitting now? In His glory. He 'sat down' (aorist tense → completed action) on His Father's throne. Jesus is right now sitting on the right hand of His Father, on the

¹ NOTE: *Shekinah* is one of those words that is not in the Bible (like *trinity*), but we use the word to represent and make reference to the concept that is clearly taught in the Bible.

Fathers throne. His Fathers throne is totally distinct from His throne, which He will occupy after the Second Coming. This is why we must reject Progressive Dispensationalism with its desire to harmonize with Covenant Theology in claiming that Jesus is now ruling in our hearts on a 'heavenly' Davidic throne. They would justify this with their go to term ... 'already, but not yet.' (You can tell I am not a fan of the phrase). I have never heard a cogent explanation of how Jesus is ruling on Davids's throne now in heaven, but then He will be ruling on Davids's throne then on earth ... when the throne He is sitting on now is the Fathers throne. OK, we beat that one verse to death. Let's move on.

³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

We must pause for a most important contemplation. These last few parables all focus on the preparedness of all those who will live through the future tribulation period. We already know, from Daniel, the beast and false prophet will kill many people who profess faith in Christ during this time (Rev. 13:15 ... "to cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.") He will also kill many Jews during this time (Dan. 7:21 ... "and I kept looking and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them" ... also Dan. 7:25 "He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One ... and they will be given into his hand for times, time, and half a time.")

Back to the passage ... Jesus Christ has some back to the earth at the Second Coming. In that return, many in the proximity of Jerusalem will be slaughtered. However, there will be many more still alive in the rest of the world. The Jews that remain will be believing Jews (all of them) and they will be gathered by the angels to Jesus in Israel (Matt. 24:31). That leaves a world full of Gentiles, both believing and unbelieving. In this context, the sheep are believing Gentiles and the goats are unbelieving Gentiles. Notice that 'all the nations' will be gathered before Him. This is unlikely to mean that Jesus is doing 'nation judgment' but He is judging individuals from every nation on earth. God does have a plan to judge the nations ... but let's move on.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? ³⁸ 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me.'

Those on his right are the sheep; they are believing Gentiles. How do we know? ... 'inherit the kingdom' ... which sounds very much like the concluding part of the previous parable ... 'enter into the joy of your master.'

Before we continue, there is one more critical question in this parable; and if it is not viewed correctly, I believe the entire parable can be interpreted poorly.

The question is ... WHO ARE "these brothers of mine?" With the near demonstrative pronoun 'these' ... it seems probable that Jesus is referencing an existing group of people in His proximity that are distinct from the sheep and the goats! It doesn't really make sense that 'these brothers of mine' are some of the sheep. I believe 'these brothers of mine' are none other than the saved Jews from the tribulation that have just been gathered back to the land of Israel. They are present for the sheep and the goat judgment ... and though I did not have time to scour the OT scriptures for a complete list of passages, I believe Joel 3:1-2 speaks of this judgment of the nations being performed in Israel.

³¹ For behold, in those days and at that time, When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather all the nations And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; And they have divided up My land.

What is absolutely unconscionable is that many, and I include evangelicals who have written commentaries on Matthew, believe that "these brothers of mine" in this parable are 'the poor.' There are those who teach that our eternal destiny is based solely

on how we cared for the poor and those in need. The Roman Catholic church places great emphasis on this parable as the basis for their worldwide benevolence ministries. Recall Mother Teresa's famous quote ... "We see Jesus in the face of the poor." Entire generations of Roman Catholics have been lost by believing that how they respond to those in need dictates their eternal destiny. Lord, wake up the sleeping world! I say the sleeping world because evangelicals are not immune to this serious error ... note this quote from an online minister ...

'In Matthew 25, one of the most terrifying passages in the Bible, Jesus describes judgment day in detail and His criterion for who's in and who's out has to do with whether you and I have served the poor and needy in this life.'

Now for the goats ...

⁴¹ "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' ⁴⁴ "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' ⁴⁵ "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' ⁴⁶ "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Clearly the goats are unbelievers who are cast into eternal punishment. They are cast into hell while they await their final resurrection and fate at the Great White Throne judgment after the thousand-year millennium. How are we to understand Jesus words here that seem to suggest our eternal destiny is based on works? I believe it is simple ... and though I could express that in a few words ... none has said it better than Fruchtenbaum²

The individual Gentiles will be judged based on their treatment of the Messiah's brethren, namely, the Jewish people, during the tribulation period (vv. 34–35). ...

The sheep, who are the pro-Semites, are clearly stated to be the righteous ones. Will they be saved, then, because of their pro-Semitism? This cannot be, for that would mean their salvation was based on works. This passage is an example of James 2:14–16, proving one's faith by one's works. Because these Gentiles are already believers in Yeshua the Messiah, they will refuse to join the Antichrist in his attempt to destroy the Jews. So, while Jews will undergo a great persecution, these believing Gentiles will do what they can to help them under these conditions. Their works toward the Messiah's brethren will prove their faith. In this manner, they are the ones who will be watching, ready, and laboring in accordance with the admonitions of the five parables. Because they are saved, they will be allowed to enter the Messianic kingdom, and they will be the ones who will populate the Gentile nations during the millennium (vv. 34–40).

The goats, on the other hand, will be the anti-Semites who, because of their unbelief in Yeshua, will join the ranks of the persecutors under the antichrist's authority. They will show their lack of faith by their works. They are the ones who will not be watching, ready, or laboring, thus violating the admonition of the five parables. For this reason, they will be killed at this point and will be excluded from the Messianic kingdom (vv. 41–45).

This concludes our series on the eschatology of the NT, specifically, in the gospel of Matthew.

Remaining Schedule

Next week, June 2 – Matthew Eschatology Review – Introduction to the Sermon ...

I will be preaching on the gathering of Matthew 24:31 and how, specifically, are we to view the current nation of Israel as it pertains to prophetic fulfillment?

² Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G., *The Footsteps of the Messiah, A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Ariel Ministries, 1982, pp. 643–644.