

The Final Day

Matthew 25:31-46
Morning reading: Psalm 73

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Main point: Jesus reveals that His coming will be in glory, with reward, and with judgment so that we live in a constant state of readiness.

Introduction:

R.C. Sproul once said, "Of all the doctrines taught in the Bible, there are three that are most hated...they are the doctrines of hell, predestination, and the last judgment." Imagine then how uncomfortable we will feel today as we discover all three of these doctrines in one passage? Yet, God wants us to hear them today with *clarity* and to respond to Him in *faith, love, obedience, and humility* because eternal matters are at stake.

Beginning in chapter 23, we have been considering the soul-searching subject of judgment with increasing *intensity*. The eternity and finality of this final day of world history summons us to pay attention with all the power that our minds can summon. Now we come to its supreme climax at the end of chapter 25. This final story builds on the previous two. In the first **Parable of the Ten Virgins**, Jesus stressed the need to *be ready* when He returns. In **the Parable of the Talents**, He taught the need to *be faithful* until He returns. Now the final story is the judgment itself. There is no getting ready or second chances here. This is it, and we are given a *divine advance preview* so that we might take appropriate action today. Notice, by way of introduction, the vivid, clear, and powerful progression in the three stories in this chapter.

In the first Parable of the Ten Virgins, **an inward test is given** which sets before us the question: *do you have the oil of saving faith?* Do you have an inward readiness because your heart has been changed? Have you become a recipient of the Holy Spirit? This is the requirement that Jesus Himself set in John 3, when He said, "*Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3).

In the second Parable of the Talents, **a Godward test is given** which asks: *does your readiness result in faithfulness?* Do you believe that it all belongs to the Master? Or, do you see Him as a harsh taskmaster who *demand*s more than He *gives*? If your readiness does not result in faithfulness, you may be like the five foolish virgins, possessing the *outward garments*, but lacking the *inward oil*. An inward readiness *always* results in a Godward faithfulness.

Now in this last analogy, we are taken further in our understanding. Jesus will explain the criteria on which judgment is to be based. Our Lord lifts the curtain of the unseen. He describes the final day. The throne is pictured, the nations are gathered, the King is seated to judge in person! The issues of eternity depend on His word. He will give sentence with discernment that cannot err, reward or punishment that cannot fail. According to each man's works, He *divides* and *separates*. He calls no witnesses, for none are needed. The books are opened, spoken of elsewhere, and without *hesitation* or *deliberation*, perfect justice is executed. The goats are banished to go into that *timeless, endless existence of punishment*, and the sheep are invited to come into that *timeless, endless existence of life*. My friend, where will you be on that final day?

In this very moving and solemn passage, Jesus reveals to us certain things that will be true about His return.

Expository outline:

- A. The Appearing of the Judge (vv.31-33)—Who is this Judge? How will He come? What will He do?
- B. The Basis of the Judgment (vv.34-40)—What *criteria* will be used to make this *separation*?
- C. The Consequences of the Judgment (vv.41-46)—To what are the sheep *welcomed* and goats *consigned*?

Transition:

What does Jesus want us to understand about His Second Coming so that we might *be ready, stay ready and faithful, and be serving*?

Exposition:

A. THE APPEARING OF THE JUDGE (vv.31-33)—Who is this Judge? How will He come? What will He do?

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.

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

Everything in verses 31-33 speaks to us of the *deity* of the Lord Jesus Christ. His *divinity* is *unmistakable*, His Godhead is *undeniable*, and His power is *unstoppable*. What stands out in bold relief is that the Christ of the Bible is not the weak, effeminate, emasculated Jesus of the religious world who would never speak a word of judgment. Oh no, but here we hear Him speak clearly concerning the *majestic authority* of His person and the discriminating glory of His work.

There are four vital questions answered about the coming judgment on the final day.

1. Who is the judge? (v.31a)

Jesus deliberately connects Himself with this holy office. Jesus is the judge. “***But when the Son of Man comes...***” The Son of Man is that Messianic title that we have come to know, and it is one of our Lord’s favorite self-designations.

- In Daniel, the Son of Man is *God’s special “end-time” Ruler*. (Dan.7:13-14)
- In Daniel, the everlasting dominion of the Son of Man is *predicted*. Now, Jesus transports us to the ultimate manifestation of its *fulfillment*.
- In Daniel, the Son of Man is given “*dominion*”—that is, *all authority or the right to rule*.
- In Daniel, the Son of Man is given a “*glory*”—not an *essential glory*, or a *moral glory*, but an *official glory*, an *ascribed glory*, a *mediatorial glory* if you will. (1 Tim.2:5)
- In Daniel, the Son of Man is not only given a *dominion* and a *glory*, but He is also given a “*kingdom*”— that is, *a people over which He rules as a gift for His sacrifice on the cross*. (John 6:37-40)

Here again, we see that Jesus claimed that title for Himself—He is *the Son of Man* (Matt.8:20; Mark 2:28).

Now note the certainty of His coming as Judge. “Now when the Son of Man comes...” Not “if” but “when.” This speaks in the perfect tense of a time in the future as if it had already occurred. He speaks with this certainty of authority throughout the passage. Verse 31, “...He will sit on His glorious throne,” Verse 32, “All the nations will be gathered before Him...and He will separate them from one another...” Verse 34, “The King will say to those on His right, Come...” Verse 41, “Then He will say also say to those on His left. Depart from Me...” Verse 46, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

These are not the empty words of a religious mad-man, but rather, the divine, authoritative, powerful words of the Son of God.

Applied: What does this mean for us? It means since *Jesus is the Judge* you cannot ignore Him. You must not take His Words lightly. He will affect a judgment upon every soul. Do not dismiss Him (*Acts 17:30*). The first question answered is, who is the Judge? The second question is...

2. How will He come? (v.31b)

“...in his glory (doxa)” A contrast is drawn between His first appearance and His second one. At His first advent, He came in *humility*, in *secrecy*, in *ignominy*, in *lowly estate*, in *privacy*, but at His second Advent, He comes in the *singular splendor of God the Father* and His heavenly glory (*Matt.16:27-28*). John writes in Revelation 1:7 says, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”

Now at His first coming, our Lord had a little company of disciples with Him, one of whom would betray Him (Judas), another would deny Him (Peter), and all would forsake Him on the cross. Here He describes His second coming flanked by “all the angels with Him.” Rank upon rank, regime upon regime, legion upon legion, He comes surrounded by the totality of the mighty angelic hosts of heaven. Although one-third of the angels defected with Satan, two-thirds remained and these holy ones—the *six-winged seraphim*, the *fiery cherubim*, the *living creatures*, the *archangel Michael*, along with *Gabriel the messenger*, all of these heavenly beings whose function it is to serve God and to execute God’s will—will accompany Christ! Angels possess superior intelligence and strength. They are unlimited in their movement and cannot die! The entourage of supernatural angelic armies will wing our enthroned Lord, and their number shall be innumerable—*ten thousand upon ten thousand* (*Deut.33:2; Dan.7:9, 10; Zech.14:5; Jude 14-15; Rev.5:11*)! This is how He will come: in *the greatest glory imaginable* and *with all His angels*.

3. What will He do? (v.31c)

“...he will sit on His glorious throne.” In the Old Testament, a priest never sat because his work was never finished. But Jesus sat down at the right hand because He finished the work of redemption by offering the only perfect and acceptable sacrifice. But when a king sat down, his work was just beginning.

The word “throne” (*thronos*) describes a large, elevated, and elaborate seat upon which a ruler sits on official occasions. Although this word was used of the seat of honor for a distinguished person like a *priest* (*1 Sam.4:13*), a *ruler* (*Psa.94:20*), and a *military officer* (*Jer.1:15*), the God of Israel is metaphorically described as sitting upon a throne (*Is.66:1; 6:1-3*). Now at this very hour, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high as the King of glory (*Heb.1:3*). At this present time, He has already ascended into glory and has been crowned as the *King of kings* and *Lord of lords*. But here He describes when He comes with the judicial authority of heaven’s King to *earth*, to sit upon a throne of judgment. It is a “glorious” throne because of the *internal* and *essential* splendor of the One who occupies it.

It is *Jesus* who has the ultimate authority over all men and their eternal destiny (*Matt.28:18-20*). The clear teaching of the New Testament is that God the Father has committed the role of judgment to God the Son (*John 5:22-23; 27; Acts 10:42; 17:30-31*). So, the Judge is *Jesus*, and when He returns in His *glory* with His *angels*, He comes to *complete the salvation of His people* and to *finalize the destiny of the lost* (*Heb.9:23-28*).

Applied: Don't think that *all* His judgment awaits His physical return. All you have to do is read your Bible casually and you will see that ALL JUDGMENT is NOT *postponed*. Sometimes God's judgment comes *quickly, publicly, and undeniably* in this life. Think of **Nebuchnezzar** in the Old Testament (*Dan.4*). Here was this Babylonian king who thought he was the ruler of the world, and God humbled him in such a way that he crawled on his knees like a beast! Think of **Ananias and Sapphira**, that couple who were members of the early church that God struck down right in church for lying to the Holy Spirit (*Acts 5:1-11*). Or think of **Herod**, whom God sent an angel to cut down because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died (*Acts 12:20-23*).

Sometimes in this life, God's judgment comes with such a *suddenness* and *finality* that it makes even the church of God tremble!

Recap: Who is the Judge? The judge is *Jesus*. How will He come? *He will come in glory*, with His *angels*, and He will sit on *a throne of judgment* rendering final judgments.

4. Whom will it involve? (vv.32-33)

It will involve the entire human race, including you and me.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

When the Judge comes, it will be clear that He is no *tribal God*. Jesus is a cosmic King. "*All the nations will be gathered before Him...*" "**All the nations**" (*ethnos*) means *the entire human race*. Not only *Gentile* nations, but *Jews* also. This is not just *non-Christians*, but *Christians* also. None are excluded, neither the *wicked* nor the *righteous*. His rule is over all the nations, regardless of one's *nationality* or *ethnicity*. All will be gathered before Him *indiscriminately and universally*. The earth gives up its dead. The sea yields up its dead. All mankind will be assembled before their Judge, and at first, it will be one vast multitude as far as the eye can see, but then a division will take place. It will be very *personal* and *close*. Jesus Himself will be the divider and He says He "**will separate the people one from another...**" We will be separated not into nations or even into families or individual churches, but "**as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.**"

Now Jesus uses an apt metaphor or a common figure that everyone listening to Him would understand. The separation of the sheep from the goats by a shepherd. This concept of a shepherd making this kind of judgment has clear references of what God Himself would administer (*Is.11:3-4; Ezek.34:17*). And what He desires to convey to us by it is that although we may classify people in different ways, the important distinctions are those set by God Himself and applied by Jesus in the final day.

In ancient Palestine, sheep and goats were often mingled during the daytime and they were hard to distinguish. When you think of sheep, don't think of the white fluffy kind of Northern Europe, but instead, think of the grayish sheep who in their younger stages, could be mistaken for a goat. The truth is, in some cases, unless you looked carefully, you could not tell the difference. But at the end

of the day, they were separated because sheep could endure the cold more easily than goats. Whereas goats would be harmed by a night out in the cold, sheep would not be harmed because of that wonderful wool sweater with which God has wrapped them. So, a shepherd's task at the end of every day was to separate the sheep from the goats.

This was a commonly seen practice in Palestine and Jesus uses it as an apt metaphor for that which will take place at the *final judgment*. He will separate the nations and individuals!

Applied: Notice, there is no middle ground between the sheep and the goats. ***"He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."*** There is no third class or third category. And there is no middle ground between the *saved* and the *lost*. You are either a sheep or a goat. You will either be on the *right* or the *left*. ***"On the right"*** in many cultures is *the place of favor*. ***"On the left"*** is *the place of disfavor*.

Jesus is going to *separate* when He comes. Some will receive a *favorable verdict* and some will receive an *unfavorable verdict*. Again, there is no *in-between*. No *special cases*. No *exemptions*. There is no area of gray that one can contemplate. You are either on the *right* or the *left*, a *sheep* or a *goat*, *saved* or *unsaved*. All our names are either in the Lamb's book of life or in the Judge's book of death. And when Jesus returns, He shall bring about a *final, unalterable, decisive* separation. This is why we must pay attention to what Jesus says. Jesus, the King, the Lord, the Judge, the ultimate, credible One is telling us: this is what it will be like. He will *judge*. He will *separate*. There will be no *alternative* or *alteration*. No *escape*. No *debate*. We WILL stand before Him. He WILL place us on the *left* or the *right*. He WILL declare *"Come..."* or *"Depart..."* Now what will be the standard that Jesus will use to make His final judgment?

B. THE BASIS OF THE JUDGMENT (vv.34-36)—What *criteria* will be used to make this *separation*?

Come up close and listen to the words of the King! The adverb ***"Then"*** marks the first comparison that He gives as He turns to those on His right.

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."

Who gets into the kingdom of Christ? It is those on His right. How many will there be? They *comprise "a multitude which no man can count"* (Rev.7:9). They heard the voice of the King of glory say, ***"Come..."*** They had accepted His previous invitation to *"Come unto Me all that weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest..."* (Matt.11:28) and now they are welcomed into the promised rest of heaven itself!

They are called, ***"...blessed of My Father..."*** Why? Because they are chosen to ***"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."***

Their blessing comes because they are chosen. They don't earn the kingdom, they inherit the kingdom as a gift (Matt.5:3; 19:29; Luke 12:32; 1 Cor.6:9-11). They are given to the Son as a love gift for His sacrifice.

- **John 6:37**—All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.
- **John 17:12**—While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

These individuals who are *given by the Father come to Christ*, and those who *come to Christ* have been foreordained to *"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

I know some bristle at the truth of **predestination**, but always remember dear friends that it is a *family doctrine*. That is, it brings comfort to the saved, although some of God's children are still confused by it.

Let me give try to help by centering your thoughts on two things: the Scriptural revelation and a simple illustration.

The revelation is this: *predestination is a doctrine that if you believe the Bible, you cannot deny it*. It is everywhere! It DOES NOT teach what *unbelievers cannot obtain because they are forbidden or prohibited*, it teaches *WHY believers enjoy what they possess by faith through grace*. (Rom.8:28-30; 9:23; 11:29; 1 Cor.2:7; Eph.1:5; 11)

Here is an illustration. Did you know that God only has *one Heir*—and His name is *Jesus*? In Hebrews 1:1-2, *"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things (inheritor of all His riches and wealth), through whom also He made the world."*

When we are saved, God as it were, adopted us into His family. Ephesians 1:5 says, *"He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His grace."* In Galatians 4:4-6, Paul says, the reason for the incarnation was so that Christ might *"redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons..."* So, Jesus is the only Heir, but we, by way of adoption, are made "joint heirs" with Christ (Rom.8:17).

Applied: Now what this means is that *before we were saved, before we heard the Gospel, and before we were born, God put us in the will!* For purposes only known to Himself, God *ordained* that the saved would be a part of His family! Now, our choice is still involved. We are not forced into the kingdom. But unless God first initiated His action, His calling, His implanting of life, we would have remained as we were. But because *God worked*, we *believed*. Because *God willed*, we *turned*. And no failure that we experience nor misstep that we make will ever get us disinherited! Why? Because we were chosen by grace and adopted in love and our inheritance is *"protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Pet.1:4-5).

So how do we know who is a sheep and who is a goat? In other words, *what is it that makes a sheep different than a goat?* (vv.35-36). Jesus tells us that it is seen in one's sustained response to Him and His people.

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.'

The identity of the sheep on the right was not because of some *ecstatic speaking in tongues*, the *experience of baptism*, or even an *outward profession of faith*.

Now we must be careful in our interpretation here because as we shall see, the sheep did not even fully understand what they were doing. What makes the sheep different than the goats is two-fold.

1. A sustained relationship to Christ

This eternal distinction that is discovered between the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the unrighteous, the saved and the lost, favored and disfavored, is based upon our response to Him. He is the standard, He is the basis, and how we respond to Him is the ultimate deciding factor. What they did, they did FOR Him. What they did, they did IN RESPONSE to Him. It was ME that you "fed" and it was ME that you gave something to "drink," and it was ME that you "invited" in, and it was ME that you "clothed." It was ME that you "looked after" and came to "visit."

In other words, the basis of the separation that takes place is going to be *Himself*. Because you believed what I SAID, and you acted upon MY WORDS, and you ministered on MY BEHALF, it is on the basis of your response to ME in serving MY KINGDOM and MY PEOPLE. It's all about Him! It is about *believing* Christ, *following* Christ, *obeying* Christ, *serving* Christ, *assisting* Christ's people, and *being faithful* His kingdom agenda (*John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11, 11:25; 14:6; 15:1*).

He is the One with whom we have to do (*Heb.4:13*). Not just on judgment day, but right now, today, for "*Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation*" (*2 Cor.6:2*). The question for us is, What are we going to do with *His claims* and *His requirements* and the *demands* that He places upon us? (*Cf. Matt.11:28-30*)

One commentator said, "Judgement day is a verdict rendered about us on the verdict that we have rendered about Him." Now let's come to some more specifics. How is our sustained relationship with Christ seen?

2. Your conduct toward the brethren (vv.37-40)

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.'

Notice, the righteousness don't exactly understand when they saw Jesus. Why did they say this? What's behind Jesus' words is *the truth of His ascension*. When He ascended to heaven, He would no longer be present *physically*, but His kingdom would go on. Decade after decade, century after century would go by, but those who truly belonged to Him would be known by how they responded to His people. You recall that even as Saul was terrorizing Christians, when Jesus appeared to Him in glory, Saul heard the voice of Christ say, "*why are you persecuting Me?*" (*Acts 9:4*).

Now the key phrase is found in verse 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.'"*

Who are these brothers of Mine, even the least of them? There are four main views: 1) *anyone who is hungry or has other physical needs*, 2) *the Jews*, 3) *The Apostles and other Christian missionaries*, and 4) *Christ's disciples or all Christians*.

Those who believe that "*the least of them*" is the *disenfranchised* generally, conclude that what Jesus is saying here is that we must be involved in philanthropic, humanitarian endeavors in order to prove our faith in Him. In other words, they say that *what you believe* is not the important thing, but *how*

you treat others and particularly poor people is what matters. They say that what *salvation will be based upon is our charitable works*. Even the well-known commentator William Barkley said, "God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need."¹

Let me labor to be clear: *the compassion of Christ reaches out and touches those who have been forgotten by men and neglected on society!* However, that is a complete misreading of the text and overthrows the whole message of the Gospel. We are not justified *by works* (Rom.3:20), but we are justified *unto* good works (Eph.2:8-10). We are not saved by our good deeds, but by *grace alone*, through *faith alone*, in *Christ alone*, for the *glory of God alone*.

If we are going to be consistent in the way we interpret the Bible—which is by taking the literal, grammatical, historical approach and by comparing Scripture with Scripture—in both its immediate context and the larger context of all the Scripture, we find that Jesus gives us the answer as to who "**His brothers**" are in **Mark 3:31-35**.

- ³¹ Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him. ³² A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." ³³ Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" ³⁴ Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

"*Brothers*" has a clear meaning in the Bible. It refers to *believers*.

- **Matthew 10:40-42**—He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. ⁴¹ He who receives a prophet in *the* name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.

There is a kind of chain of reception here. You receive *the disciple of Christ*, you receive *Christ*. You receive *Christ*, you receive the One who sent Him—*the Father*. Jesus says that those who are true sheep and who stand in a position of *favor* are those who *respond to Him, believe Him, obey His words*, do not just pay lip service, but *support, assist, disciple, love, visit, and encourage all His people*. From the most visible spokesmen (like those who preach) to the ordinary laymen (*the righteous man*, and even the least significant believer in the family). That's the one who shall be saved and rewarded.

The criterion is all about *Him*.

Applied: Christ's kingdom is *inherited* as a gift, not *earned* as a worker. It was *prepared* before the foundation of the world! The cause of salvation is not our works. The source of salvation is God Himself. It was purchased completely by the *perfect obedience* and the *sacrificial, substitutionary death of Christ* on the cross. Love *for*, service *to*, and assistance *of* His people are the evidence or effect of our salvation. (Cf. 1 John 3:14-16; 4:20-21; John 13:34-35; James 2:15-17)

¹ William Barkley, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol.2*, Westminster Press, 1958, p.360

Recap:

- Who are the sheep? They are those who received Christ and responded to Christ.
- How did they receive Christ? They receive His words and believed them.
- What is the evidence of it? In their love and care for other believers or God's people.
- What is the reward? The kingdom of God.

C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF JUDGMENT (vv.41-46)—To what are the sheep *welcomed* and goats *consigned*?



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; ⁴²for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³I 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.’ ⁴⁴Then 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?’ ⁴⁵Then 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.’ ⁴⁶These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

We hear in this section, the most awful words in all the Bible in my opinion. He is speaking to people who have been *exposed*. People who failed to respond to His words and gave *superficial excuses* for their actions. Now Jesus speaks His final judgment.

What could be more horrific than hearing the only Savior and the only God, who is King of the only Kingdom of eternal joy and love say, “**Depart from Me...**”? What could be more awful than to hear Him say, “*Depart from Me...*”?

“**Depart...**” (*poreuomai*)—it means to “*go out*.” It is not a *suggestion*, but an *imperative*. Jesus is saying, “*I have nothing more to say to you. I will have nothing more to do with you...*”

The phrase “**depart from Me...**” is, in reality, what the *disfavored* on the left have been saying their entire lives. When the Gospel was heard in their hearing, they said, “Depart from me O Christ, I have no time for the arrows of Your conviction! I want to live a guilt-free life.”

When circumstances were orchestrated to show that God was in charge, that you could not save yourself and that you needed a Savior, you said, “Depart from me O Christ, I will not have Your salvation, Your redemption, Your provision, Your Spirit, Your peace, Your forgiveness, Your cross, or Your suffering...I will have nothing of Your words or Your claims.”

Now the Judge says, “You chose to live without Me, I will now seal you in that choice.” “Depart from Me...I have nothing more to say to you. I will have nothing to do with you.”

This is a warning for those who *profess to love Jesus* but *do not love the church*. This is why we should be concerned about those who *profess to love the Bridegroom* but *not the bride*. Jesus here binds together *the saved life* with *loving His people*. It is a hollow claim to say *you love Jesus*, but you *don't love the church*.

- How can you say you love the Savior, but not the saved?
- How can you claim to be saved, and not loved sinners who have received the same salvation as you profess to possess from Christ?

What is the reason the goats appear on the left and are judged? Notice the same six-fold description is repeated, "*I was...*" But here each is followed by, "*you did not...*" "*I was...you gave Me nothing...nothing, did not, did not, did not...*" What we must not overlook is that all of the sins were sins of neglect. This is why Hebrews 2:3 declares, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

The *neglect* proves that they did not believe, and this is why they are condemned. *Unbelief*.

What are the goats consigned to? Jesus says in verse 41, "... into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;..." Jesus says in verse 46, "*These will go away into eternal punishment.*"

Two things are clear, and I find no pleasure in speaking of either one. I stand before you as a watchman on the wall, but although the warning will cleanse my hands of blood-guiltiness if you reject Christ, it still brings me no comfort to know that some will not heed the warning. I long to say of some of you what Paul said of the Thessalonians, "*For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of the Lord at His coming?*" (1 Thess.2:19). Friends, listen to the words of Jesus Christ!

The first thing that is clear is the association of unbelieving sinners, and the second is, the duration of the unbelieving sinner's punishment.

In His loving and merciful wisdom, Jesus explains to us that this eternal separation will be in the company of "*the devil and his angels*." Hell WAS NOT prepared for sinners, because sinners were not created to be separated from God. But it's where they end up, because some willfully reject their Creator and choose their own way instead of God's.

Imagine the most horrid fiend in the universe, the one whose chief goal was to defy God and bring others to share in his demise. If you reject Christ, you are going to take up your everlasting abode with the devil and his demons! And they will not be tormenting you, but they will be suffering together with you, "shoulder to shoulder" as it were, under the wrath (what unmitigated fury) of God.

"**Eternal fire**" is symbolic language, but the purpose of this imagery is to point beyond what literal language can convey. But I hear some clever, quick-witted debater saying, "Pastor I see a contradiction! How can there be *darkness* and *fire*...if there is *fire*, there must be *light*, for fire produces light. See, here is a contradiction!"

Oh, dear friend, is the plain meaning of the Scripture not enough for you? Do you have to search the world of experience to understand that *burning* and *darkness* are not mutually exclusive? Have you not heard of some forms of radiation that burns, but there is no light! Have you not experienced *a burning thirst* or *a burning fever*? Yet, there is no fire as you laid there in bed praying that the fever would subside!

What Jesus is seeking to convey to us is that hell is a place of *suffering, bad association, total separation*—and although God is everywhere because He is omnipresent, He is not everywhere in love and in patience! The duration is *eternal*. That is the word the Bible uses to describe *timeless, endless existence*—not *annihilation*. Punishment for crimes committed against an infinitely holy God! But Jesus says the goat's punishment is eternal. The same word is used to describe the believer's life: eternal.

Jesus said in His high priestly prayer in **John 17:3**—"*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*"

John 10:27-28—My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Saving faith matters. Faithfulness matters. Serving Christ and His people matters.

Conclusion:

What will be the outcome of your life? Will it be acceptance? Will it be rejection?

George Whitefield is described by some as the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul. It was said that in his character he was one of the most godly and beautiful servants of Christ in history. It was said that when he preached on judgment, "He could bring the vivid reality of hell so close to people that they would physically tremble in the church or countryside where he preached."

Someone once said this to the Countess of Huntington, who was a member of a church where Whitefield frequently preached, and she said, "Ah yes, he does. But that is not the thing that moves people most. The thing that moves people most is that he cannot preach about such a subject without weeping...and the wells of his heart being broken, he cannot contain himself over the truth of it. Such a man loves them so much that he himself is heart-broken at the possibility that they themselves might inherit hell rather than heaven."²

Jesus has done more than weep for you, He has *suffered* and *died* in your place on the cross. He *has risen from the dead* and *ascended to the right hand of His Father*. From heaven's throne, He calls you today. If you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. He stands at the door, on the threshold of eternity and time, He could open it at any moment and return. Are you ready?

The warnings are these...

1. Appearances may be deceptive (in ourselves and in others).
2. Confidence can be misplaced.
3. Opportunity may be squandered.
4. Judgment is irreversible.

I began with R.C. Sproul, and I'll end with him. At the end of this account, he said to his congregation at St. Andrews, "Do yourself a favor. Before you go to bed tonight, before you fall asleep, ask yourself: 'Am I a sheep? Am I a goat? Is my faith real? What is my destiny?'" Jesus is going to return one day, and when He does, judgment will happen. Make sure you are prepared."³

² As told by Eric Alexander, *Sermon on Matthew 25*, tapesfromscotland.org

³ R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary*, Crossway Wheaton, Ill. 2013 p.736

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