

Sermon Reflection: The King Will Separate the Nations

Bible Verses Referenced: Ephesians 1:18, Matthew 25:3-46, Matthew 5:11-12, Matthew 10:40-42, Matthew 28:19-20

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Word in it. You challenge us to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened and opened so that we might know Your will for this world and Your great plans for it. And so, we ask that the ministry and preaching of Your Word might be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus. In His name, we pray. Amen. Please be seated.

One of the big prayers at the beginning of the book of Ephesians is that Paul is praying that our eyes of our hearts would be enlightened, which is kind of an interesting thing to think about our hearts having eyes, but that's the way he describes it, is that our eyes have a way of our hearts have a way of seeing things in ways that maybe our physical eyes or other aspects of our senses don't.

And that is that God wants us to perceive His work in this world and understand what the Kingdom of God is doing, what Jesus is doing in this world, and that is only perceived by the heart. And so, Paul prays for us that our hearts would be illuminated and enlightened so that we can perceive the hand of God in this world.

I want to shift gears a little bit and reflect with you about the Gospel passage and maybe see if we can't see something of the plan of God and how it is unfolding through the person of Jesus Christ in this world. So, this story from Matthew of the king who is before his throne, and there are the sheep and the goats that are being separated out.

This is very familiar to us, but I want us to think about it with some fresh eyes, and perhaps the eyes of our hearts will be opened and enlightened to it. First of all, this is part of a larger context of what is known as Jesus' Olivet Discourse, or the eschatological sermon, that is one of five sermons that are in the book of Matthew.

And this last sermon is all about what is going to take place at the end of the age, the end of the age. And what he says is, is when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And he'll place the sheep on his right, and his goats are on the left. And in this story, you want to be a sheep. You don't want to be a goat, right? So, what is this about? Well, this is about the end, the end of the age. An age that is inaugurated with the first coming of Jesus Christ, where He has His birth and His earthly ministry as the incarnation of God in the flesh.

He dies on a cross, three days later, rises from the dead. And then 40 days after that, something very important happens. Anybody know? What happens? I heard it out there very faintly. The ascension. 40 days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus ascends to the right hand of God the Father and takes the throne of heaven and begins to reign as the Messianic King from the right hand of God the Father.

And then ten days after that, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and all of that complex of the first coming of the Messiah inaugurates the kingdom of God and the age of the Messiah. And so the gospel message goes out, repent. The kingdom of God is at hand. Believe the good news. And the call goes out to all the peoples of the world. That's something that's very different prior to the age of the Messiah.

At that time, it was pretty much focused on the nation of Israel. But after the coming of the Messiah and the ascension of Jesus to the heavenly realms and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, there is a sending out of the apostles and disciples out to the ends of the earth to go and take the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel, and call all people from every tribe, every nation to repent and believe the good news.

Now, as God sends out His ambassadors, they are not always well-received. And this is throughout the teaching of the gospel. It begins in Matthew chapter 5 where the Beatitudes are found. And he talks about all the blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, and so on.

And he gets to the end of the Beatitudes, and he says these words, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." And we don't often think about this in our day of the United States.

We have all these wonderful freedoms to worship God however we want to. But for most of Christian history, being a follower and a disciple of Jesus Christ was not an easy task. It was something that would set you at odds with the culture. And by the way, it really should in our day too. But it would set you at odds with the culture, and more often than not, it would lead to some form of persecution.

And so here Jesus is saying, as God is wrapping up the entire age, there will be a great judgment and a sorting. And it will be the nations of the world that will be sorted. In other words, all the peoples of the planet will be judged on that day.

And in that sorting, it will be not unlike He said in other places, there will be some who will be judged unworthy, like the foolish virgins and the story of the wise and foolish virgins, or the sorting of the fish, or the wheat and the tares, and the tares will be burned like chaff. In this case, it's sheep and goats. But there will be a sorting. And the criteria on that day is very important to understand.

It will be how you related to the people of Jesus. Because however you related to them, you were relating to Jesus Himself. This is a principle that is throughout the Bible that is the Shellac principle. That's Hebrew. But basically, it's the idea that whoever is an emissary is a representative and the equivalent of the one who sent them.

And so, in the Old Testament, a prophet is a shellac of God. And to hear the Word of the Prophet is to hear the Word of God Himself. And to reject the prophet is to reject God. Jesus said of His disciples that if they reject you, they are rejecting Me.

And He would teach them this Shalaic principle all throughout the Gospel of Matthew, it's recounted. He says of His disciples, "Whoever receives you receives Me. Whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. The one who receives a prophet because He's a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

And then He says, "Whoever gives even a cold cup of water to one of the least of these My disciples, you have given it to me." One of the mistakes that is often made about the way that we read this passage from Matthew chapter 25 is that we think of it in terms of just simply the charge to do good works and humanitarian aid out in the world, a sort of a progressive vision of we just need to help bring the poor up and to serve the poor and the needy.

It's not what this is about at all. What this passage is about is about how does the world either welcome or reject the Christian missionary? Jesus sends out His apostles two by two in need. They're not to take gold or anything else. They're to go out in poverty. And in some houses they will be shown hospitality.

They will be welcomed in, fed, nurtured, and welcomed as a stranger. In other houses, those very apostles will be rejected. And Jesus tells them to dust the dust off their feet and walk away from that family or that town. This is what this parable is about, is that at the end of the age, the world will be judged on how it responds to you.

And that's something that's quite awesome to think about. Whether the world receives the messengers of Jesus Christ as His Sheliacs or not, it's His apostles. You are charged with representing Jesus Christ into this world, and you're called to be the light and the salt, and to go out into this world and proclaim the good news, or the way that he puts it at the end of his gospel, is to go forth into all the nations and baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and make disciples of all nations.

Not everyone will receive you. Some will. Those who do receive the message of the gospel and welcome with open arms and hospitalities, the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, will receive a favorable judgment on the end of the age. Those who reject the message of Jesus Christ by mistreatment of the Christians of this world will be judged as goats.

It's a very challenging passage, actually, when you think about it. But it says something not only about what's going to happen at the end of the age, but about the awesome responsibility that we have as Christians to faithfully represent Jesus Christ. Because when they receive us or reject us, if we are being faithful to the call, they are receiving and rejecting Jesus Himself.

And so it's upon us to present and to manifest Jesus Christ faithfully in order that the world might know that He has come and that He is on His throne reigning. And as our prayer says in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So be the representatives of Jesus Christ.

This is Christ the King Day, where we celebrate the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.