

The Sheep and the Goats

Intro: Well good morning and welcome to church. We're so glad that you're here with us this morning whether in person or online. If you're new here my name is Seth and I'm one of the pastors here at The Well. I'm a huge lover of kids movies because I still have yet to grow up. I actually had four kids so that I would be able to keep watching kids movies without anyone thinking I'm weird. Now people just think I'm weird for having four kids. But one of my favorite kids movies that I've watched is the Lego Movie. You guys know the one I'm talking about? Everything is awesome. Chris Pratt, Will Arnett, Will Ferrell, Morgan Freeman. What a cast. You know what was so good about that movie? It was great for my kids, but it hit all the nostalgia buttons for me. It was intentionally designed for parents. We live in a culture that lives for nostalgia. We want to feel the feelings we used to feel because we're all convinced that the time of our childhoods was the best. Right? But spoiler alert, the 90s were the best. The Lego Movie was a masterclass in telling an original story in a way that recaptured all of the stories we loved from our childhoods. Now, did you know that the Bible has a story like this? There's this story in the Old Testament that gets quoted all the time because it's like that movie from our childhood that could never be topped. So we're going to be hanging out in Matthew 25 today, but we're actually going to start in Daniel 7 because it sets the scene for us.

I. Set The Scene

- A. **Daniel 7:9-14** - "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.
- B. So picture the scene: your life has had ups and downs, but mostly downs. Israel has gone through trauma after trauma. You know that God promised that there would be one born from the woman who would come and crush all evil, but where is he?
 - 1. And now you've been kidnapped from home and are forced to live as a slave in a foreign country with a foreign language.
 - 2. Things couldn't get worse. But this story gives you hope. Because you see that one day God is going to lift up this human one, he's going to give him a seat in the court, he's going to judge all of the nations and he's going to reign forever.
 - a) Now that's good news. We're all desperate for justice. We're desperate for wrongs to be made right.

- b) We've felt the pain of wrongs done to us, we've felt the pain of the wrongs this sinful world throws at us like illness and natural disasters. We know, deep down that these things are wrong and need to be made right. So you can see how a story like this one would become a favorite because it demonstrates that final victory over evil and all wrong.
- 3. Now, you can still enjoy the Lego movie if you're a kid. But if you're an adult then you know that when they mock batman for the way he talks that it's a cut at the Christian Bale movies.
 - a) We're in this series on the parables of Jesus and this parable in Matthew 25 is a familiar one that you can know and understand without Daniel 7, but I wanted to read Daniel 7 first so that when we read this parable it lights up in a different way and you see what Jesus is doing.
 - b) We're in this section where Jesus is being asked about the temple being destroyed. So Jesus tells a story that's connected to Daniel 7 which occurred after a previous time the temple was destroyed. So here we go...

II. Reversing the Story

- A. **Matthew 25:31-33** - "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.
- B. Can you see it already? There's judging so there's a courtroom, there's a throne for a judge. All the nations are there. Oh and who is it who's offered a seat to be judge the nations and be worshiped forever in Daniel 7? It's the Son of Man. What does Jesus call himself here? The Son of Man. It's a mirror image of Daniel 7.
 - 1. Now, the parable of the sheep and goats is pretty familiar to us so we're going to have to do a little bit of work to unlearn and relearn.
 - 2. This starts by saying, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory" and that's an interesting translation. It's the Greek word **ἐρχομαι** which means to come, but also to go. So we have a word to express when someone was with us and now they aren't, and we have a word to express when someone was away and now they're near. The Greek's used a word to express movement from one place to another. Maybe closer, maybe further.
 - a) Why does this matter? Well, because if you don't know that this story is building off of Daniel 7 then maybe this is something that doesn't happen until the very end of time. But if you know this is Daniel 7 then you know that this is something that happens when the Son of Man ascends to heaven.
 - b) Is there a time that Jesus ascends prior to the very end of time? You bet there is. Shortly after the end of this book he ascends to be seated at the right hand of the Father. Kind of like the Son of Man being seated at the right hand of the Ancient of Days.

(1) Do you see it? Do you see what Jesus is doing here? And all of this matters because it determines how we hope in Jesus and how we hope now determines how we live our day-to-day lives.

(2) So let's read the rest of this parable and see what's going on here.

C. **Matthew 25:34-46** - "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 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, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

1. Now, I don't know about you guys, but I've always been taught that this is the final judgement that you and I would face, but there are actually quite a few things here that don't line up with that.

2. Let me explain with an example from your worship pastor. See, you may think that your worship pastor is the youngest pastor on staff. And I suppose that in a more biological sense he is because he's still a baby 23-year-old.

a) But in other ways he is actually the oldest member of our staff. See, there's one way that I know people gauge how old they are. It's the same way that I've heard my entire life. Some of you are lucky enough to never have to deal with this, but you know that you're old the day that you have to get bifocals.

b) Did you know that your 23 year old worship pastor has bifocals? See, my knees may sound like eating an entire bag of pop rocks when I get up, but my glasses only have one prescription.

D. But a lot of biblical texts like this read kind of like bifocals. One part of the lens sees up close and another part sees far away. So don't throw away your idea of a judgement at the end of time, but what about now? What about the close up to our current reality?

1. Think about it this way. My kids have a tendency to fight a lot. Turns out when you're young enough that your only job is to have fun it's actually still really hard to do. So, recently one of the kids pushed Norah and knocked her over while she had something in her mouth.

2. Now I know that I have a lot of room to improve as a parent, but I also know that I'm a good enough parent that I didn't sit all of my kids down and say, "Now children... one day God will make all things right and he will judge the wicked."
 - a) Right? Like it doesn't make that not true, but in addition to that there needs to be some level of immediate justice.
 - b) So when I was doing the study for this sermon I immediately asked, "Who are the least of these?" Our immediate thought is that it's the least fortunate in society. And that's not a bad intuition. But Jesus says,
- E. **Matthew 25:40** - "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these **brothers and sisters of mine**, you did for me.'
1. It was just back in Matthew 12 that Jesus defined who his brothers and sisters are. Jesus was in a building teaching and someone told Jesus his mother and brothers were outside looking for him.
 2. Rather than going to see his mom Jesus said, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" What a weird question. And then he goes on to say that his mother, brothers, and sisters are those who do the will of his Father. In fact, the word that Jesus uses to describe the "least" is a word that refers to disciples every single time Matthew uses it.
 - a) So we've done a lot to deconstruct this passage, but what is it actually saying?
 - b) **NT Wright (ME) says, "Jesus is portrayed as launching his followers on their dangerous and vulnerable mission as his brothers and sisters, with the knowledge that he, their older brother, is already ruling the world and taking note of what they suffer."**
 - (1) See, I think there's a tendency to look at a passage like this and start to worry because we want to know which side we're on. But Jesus is sharing this story as a story of hope. Not just hope that when everything is said and done that there will be justice, but that as we navigate this broken world Jesus takes the way that we're treated seriously.
 - (2) Jesus is looking at the most marginalized among Christians and saying that he sees you and that he will bring justice.
- F. You know, sometimes when I tell people I'm a pastor there are are some bad reactions. Some people have dealt with some serious church hurt and many times it has come from a pastor. Unfortunately, I know more than one pastor who had sexual relations with a minor. One of them was arrested, the other one ran away with her until she turned 18 and he is currently a pastor.
1. Those around him decided that all is okay because she's of age now and they're married, so the sin is forgiven. I find that repulsive and I look to passages like this one to say, "Jesus we need your justice now!"
 - a) I remember Philip and I lamenting that situation and I reminded him that one day Jesus is going to judge all of us and all things will be made right. And Philip

responded by saying that's not good enough. What about the people being hurt now? What about the injustice now?

- b) And honestly, at the time I didn't have a response. Because I felt the same thing I just wasn't brave enough to say it like he did. That girl had her relationship with her parents ruined because of this. That's not fair. That's not right. And I think it's totally fair for us to say that, while we still need Jesus' ultimate judgement at the end of time, we also need his justice right now! Jesus said the Kingdom of God is here, so where is it?
 - c) There's that constant ache inside of so many of us, and while we certainly don't see exactly what God is doing, while we can't comprehend his wisdom, he assures us that he sees us and he's not forgotten any of this.
2. There are plenty of you who are going through your own crisis. Some of you have been wronged by a spouse, by friends, by parents, by children. Some of you are trying so hard to faithfully follow Jesus and it seems like you just keep getting torn down. This passage is for you!
- a) Every day the sheep and the goats would go out and graze together and it would be every single night that they would have to be separated because the sheep could stay warm, but the goats would need special provisions to stay warm.
 - b) This wasn't just a one time thing at the end of time, the sheep and the goats were separated every single day. So there is a sense that we get to say to Jesus that we need that end times justice today and every day.
 - (1) We don't just need his justice to punish the wicked, but we are desperate for all things to be made right. The biblical idea of peace isn't just that there's a lack of war or fighting, but that there is a flourishing.
 - (2) Like most of us get along with our neighbors to the extent that we don't talk to them. There's peace because there's no fighting. But that's not biblical peace. Biblical peace means that we're actually working for the flourishing of our neighbors and they're working for our flourishing. Isn't that a much better picture? What if everyone in your neighborhood was working for your good? That's the biblical idea of peace.
 - c) And this passage reminds us that every single day Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father and he is looking at all of this. And justice is being distributed depending on how the world treats his followers.
 - (1) Jesus has sent his followers out on a really dangerous mission. He doesn't just send them out and say good luck. He sends them out and says, "I'm with you."
 - (2) And just like I have some really clear expectations for how every single person in this world treats my children, Jesus also has really clear expectations for how the world treats us. I don't expect anyone to treat and love my kids like I do, but I do expect people to treat my kids with dignity. I do expect people to treat my kids like human beings. Jesus expects the same of this world toward us.

- (3) But here's the thing. If Jesus expects that of the world, then how much more does he expect it from us?

III. How Much More?

- A. **James 2:15-17** - Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- B. James, the brother of Jesus, is essentially telling us that if we tell someone that we're praying for them but don't actually do anything that we have no faith. That's an extreme statement.
1. But you know what I notice in the story of the sheep and the goats? The first group of people are welcomed in and they don't celebrate, instead they're confused. They ask Jesus when they ever saw him in jail, without food, or as a foreigner.
 2. What that tells me is that Jesus is looking for the people who aren't keeping score. It's the people who are simply doing good because that's who they are. As Christians, we're to be the kind of people who are acting for the good of others simply because we know that every human being was made in the image of God.
 - a) I want to share a couple of stories with you from a commentary from **William Barclay (DSB)**,
 - b) "There were two men who found this parable blessedly true. The one was Francis of Assisi; he was wealthy and high-born and high-spirited. But he was not happy. He felt that life was incomplete. Then one day he was out riding and met a leper, loathsome and repulsive in the ugliness of his disease. Something moved Francis to dismount and fling his arms around this wretched sufferer; and in his arms the face of the leper changed to the face of Christ. The other was Martin of Tours. He was a Roman soldier and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money; but the beggar was blue and shivering with cold, and Martin gave what he had. He took off his soldier's coat, worn and frayed as it was; he cut it in two and gave half of it to the beggar man. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and all the angels and Jesus in the midst of them; and Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels said to him, " Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave it to you?" And Jesus answered softly, " My servant Martin gave it to me." When we learn the generosity which without calculation helps men in the simplest things, we too will know the joy of helping Jesus Christ himself."
- C. What if followers of Jesus, no, what if The Well was defined by being a group of people who see Jesus in everyone? What if we were defined as a group of people who would always go above and beyond for those who need it most? What if we were defined as a people who see the unseen and love the unlovable? Not just who pray for them, but people who pray for them while physically loving them.
1. See, we so often plead with Jesus for justice here and now and I think that so often Jesus is pleading with us for justice here and now. He's saying to us that we are his

body, we are his hands and feet, so what are we doing to see his justice here and now for those who so desperately need it?

2. We are called to be a people who live as if the new creation is already here. Why? Because it is, in us. Paul says that anyone who is in Christ is already a new creation. So what Jesus has already done in us, we spread to the rest of the world knowing that, no matter how concerning it may get, that Jesus is watching and he is bringing justice in a perfect manner. But also that there will be a final and ultimate judgement when all things are made right.
 - a) And so if you're someone here today who doesn't yet know Jesus. I want you to know that he knows your problems, he knows your pains. He doesn't promise to make your life perfect here and now, but he does promise that he sees you and that he will bring judgement. He will bring justice on behalf of those who call him Lord.
 - b) So that's your invitation today. Romans says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Takeaways:

1. Meet a neighbor
2. Meet a physical need
3. Write down an injustice and prayerfully give it to God