

MBC - 8/12/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson  
"Mercy and Judgment"  
Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus concludes His final sermon, on the End of the World with this breathtaking picture of the judgment of all people. This is what the Holy Spirit wanted to imprint on our minds as His final teaching of Jesus: Every person will face Jesus as either Judge or Savior. Those who meet Him as their Savior will go into eternal life, and those who meet Him as their Judge into eternal punishment. Are you ready for that meeting? Let's read it—

- Matthew 25:31-46 <sup>31</sup>"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup>And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' <sup>41</sup>"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

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This is a hard passage. It's almost too clear: sheep and goats, left and right, heaven and hell. Charles Darwin said about this passage in Matthew what many people feel:

- I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the biblical text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother, and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.

But what if there is no ultimate judgment? No accountability for the wicked, cruel things people do? What is God like if that is true?

I read a sad story in the Press Democrat this week: A little over a year ago, a young man named Jay and his girlfriend, Lauren, quit their techie jobs to travel the world on bicycles and prove their thesis that "the world is overwhelmingly good." Jay told his boss when he gave his notice, "There's a magic out there in this great big beautiful world." They shipped their bikes to Africa and began their journey. Along the way strangers helped them with food and shelter. He wrote this: "You read the papers and you're led to believe that the world is a big, scary place, people are not to be trusted. People are bad. People are evil. I don't buy it. Evil is a make-believe concept we've invented to deal with the complexities of fellow humans holding value and beliefs and perspectives

different than our own . . . but by and large, humans are kind. . . generous, wonderful, and kind. No greater revelation has come from our journey than this.”

On day #369 of their journey, they were with a few others on their bicycles in Tajikistan. A group of Muslim militants who had vowed to slaughter all “dis-believers” rammed their truck into the group, killing four of them, including Jay and Lauren.

This couple was sadly wrong about mankind. Evil does exist, as Scripture says, and everything in us cries out that evil must be punished. If God is good and just - and loving! - He *must* punish evil. He can't let it go, and treat everyone exactly the same. Abraham cried out to God to spare the innocent before He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—

- Genesis 18:25 <sup>25</sup>Far be it from you to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked? Far be that from you! *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*”

Yes, He will! He must! I like the way someone put it: “We need a God who gets angry. We need a God who will protect his kids, who will once and for all remove bullies and perpetrators of evil from His playground.” And beloved, know this: on that day that Jesus describes here, every person will be treated with perfect justice. But there will be a difference: Every unbeliever will get what he or she deserves. Every Christian will get what *Christ* deserves.

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Now this passage has been twisted to say some wrong things. Liberal Bible scholars say Jesus was teaching here that we are saved by our good works; and even people who have never heard of Jesus will be saved if they showed mercy to others.

And I read one respected Bible teacher who says that this passage has *nothing* to do with you and me at all because it's dealing with the way Gentiles treat believing Jews during the 7 year Tribulation after the Rapture! No. You and me are in this future scene, along with every person who has ever lived. This is the same scene described in Rev.20 when God raises and judges all the living and the dead.

- *Let me sum up what Jesus says here:* Justification is always by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but those who enter Christ's Kingdom will have the sure *evidence - or fruit*, of God's grace in their lives, and that evidence is mercy and love, specifically toward other Christians. Those who enter into eternal punishment will have no fruit of God's grace in their lives.

So now let's see what the Spirit would say to us this morning—

### I. The Son is the Judge.

- Matthew 25:31-32 <sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Jesus has been talking about His return since the beginning of ch.24. This is what He described in—

- Matthew 24:30-31 <sup>30</sup>Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the

clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup>And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

And immediately, when He returns, “*then He will sit on His glorious throne.*” Judgment. And Jesus will be the Judge of all men. He said this in John’s Gospel—

- John 5:27-29 (Jesus says) <sup>27</sup>And He (the Father) has given Him (Jesus) authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup>Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when *all* who are in the tombs will hear His voice <sup>29</sup>and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

All. But Jesus also said this just a few verses earlier—

- John 5:24 <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

So this should raise the question in our minds: Are Christians going to be judged or not? We know that a Christians’ sins were judged on the cross. Rom.8:1: “*There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ.*” We don’t “*come into judgment.*” So are we judged or not?

- If you don’t remember the sermon, please go back and listen to it, it is one of the most important sermons I’ve ever preached, “**No Condemnation Now I Dread,**” 10/22/2018 - find it on our website, or on your phone app. Christians will never, ever have their sins brought up against them - when Jesus said, “*It is Finished!*” He meant it! They were nailed to the cross and you bear them no more. We will be at that great Judgment for rewards, and commendation, and to display to men and angels the *evidence* of God’s saving grace in our lives. But there will be no shaming of God’s people there, no rebuke, no scolding - *how could there be when we are clothed in His righteousness, and we are like Him because we have seen Him in His glory?*

I.e., your eternal destiny will not be in question! It won’t be a matter of God weighing your good deeds and bad deeds on a scales. You have no bad deeds on your account because they were all put on Christ! And all of His righteousness was put into your account - so you’re in the black.

- And the eternal destiny of the goats won’t be in question either. Eternal destiny is sealed in this life. The heart you die with is the heart you will be raised with. For unbelievers, this Judgment won’t determine their destiny, it will just confirm it.

And who will be at this great Judgment? “All the nations,” *panta ta ethne* = all peoples, tribes, and tongues. We tend to read this and think of people grouped by their nationalities - like it’s the Olympics. That’s not what Jesus means here. All peoples will be gathered at this judgment, Jews, Gentiles, everyone who has ever lived, but they will be judged as individuals, not by group.

And Jesus Christ will be the Judge! Of all men. Forget your Coexist bumper stickers!

- John 5:22-23 <sup>22</sup>For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup>that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

\*Tell people that the Jesus they don't want to hear about will be their Judge! They should reconsider! On that day, you want to look up at that Judge and be able to say, "That Judge is my Savior! He already took my sentence on Himself so that I stand forgiven and justified before Him." And that will be the most liberating, joyful moment you have ever experienced.

## II. The sheep before Jesus.

- Matthew 25:34 <sup>34</sup>Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

\*Hear these words! If you are a Christian, this is what you will hear Him say to you! If you ever have any fear of meeting Jesus, banish that fear. 'When you find yourself standing in the Son,' He will say to you: "Come!" Just like you heard Him say, "*Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest!*" You will hear Him personally invite you to *come* into His eternal kingdom.

And *if* He will say it to you, this is *why* He will say it. This is the *cause* - because you are "*blessed by His Father, to inherit a kingdom prepared for [you] from the foundation of the world*" - i.e., before time began. And that's when God chose to set His love on you, and make you His child—

- Ephesians 1:4 <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love
- Revelation 13:8 says that their names were . . . written before the foundation of the world in the Lamb's book of life.

This is all a free gift from God. It's all grace. It wasn't earned by them. None of them deserved to be a sheep instead of a goat. Sheep have nothing to brag about! It's only because God graciously, of His own free will chose them to be holy and blameless that Jesus now invites them into His Kingdom for the rest of eternity.

So this demolishes the idea that Jesus is teaching salvation by good works here. Acts of mercy and kindness couldn't be the basis for God's choosing us - we weren't even born when He chose us! His sovereign choice was the cause, these were the effect - the proof that He chose us. of God's grace. Remember Eph.2:10? Those on His right simply carried out the "*good works, which God prepared beforehand, that they should walk in them.*"

What Jesus says to His sheep is just amazing—

- Matthew 25:35-40 <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup>And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

The question is, who are “*the least of these my brothers?*”

Many Bible scholars say that it’s anyone in need. Aren’t we supposed to love our neighbor as ourselves, and isn’t our neighbor anyone God puts in our path? Absolutely! We don’t ask a hungry person if he or she is a Christian before we feed them. At our Relief Center after the Valley Fire we gave away tons of food and clothes and tents and blankets, and money - and we’re still giving money to help people re-build their homes. It didn’t matter whether people were brothers and sisters in Christ. We didn’t even ask, except for an opportunity to witness!

- I got an email this week from our good friend Gary LeBlanc with Mercy Chefs. He said, “Doug, we’re in Redding helping out the folks up here in the Carr fire. Are there needs there we can help with?” He didn’t ask if there were any hungry Christians! They feed anyone and everyone. . . .

But *specifically*, Jesus is talking here about Christians helping other needy brothers and sisters in Christ. And there are two reasons we know this—

1.) Jesus calls them “*my brother.*” And Jesus only calls *Christians* His brothers and sisters—

- Matthew 12:49-50 <sup>49</sup>And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>50</sup>For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

His brothers are his disciples. This isn’t everybody. This isn’t every suffering person. Everyone is a neighbor - even your enemies! - but not everyone is a brother or sister.

2.) He says that when we serve “*the least of His brothers,*” we serve *Him*. Jesus identifies so closely with His people, that the way we treat Christians is the way we treat Him. Saul learned this on the road to Damascus! “*Saul, Saul, we do you persecute - Me?*” “You strike them, you strike Me!” And when we show mercy and kindness to “*the least of His brothers,*” sick and suffering believers, we serve Jesus Himself. We need to let that sink in: The way we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ is the way we treat Him - it shows that we love Jesus.

\*We don’t ignore unbelievers. I hope I can make this clear: We are drawn to show mercy to Christians because we see Christ in them, and we are drawn to show mercy to unbelievers because we want to see Christ in them. We help suffering believers because they bear the name of Christ. And we help suffering unbelievers in the hope that they will come to bear the name of Christ.

And you and I never know whether or not that unbeliever we help out might be one of God’s elect who will one day hear Christ’s voice and be saved! Paul said it like this—

- Galatians 6:10 “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

*And especially* our own brothers and sisters. When they struggling, suffering, lonely, hungry; money problems, *sin* problems - I mean some of them are in jail, and it doesn’t say how they got there. We show mercy because we’ve been shown mercy, right? Mercy isn’t what we *deserve*. Mercy is what we *need*. And especially, *especially*, our brothers and sisters in need because we share Christ and eternal life with them.

Jesus' half-brother, James, made the same point that true faith shows itself in mercy toward other believers in need—

- James 2:15-17 <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister (a Christian) is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup>So also faith by itself, if it does *not* have works, is dead.

John said the same thing—

- 1 John 3:16-78 <sup>16</sup>By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the *brothers*. <sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his *brother* in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Listen to Jesus—

- Matthew 10:42 <sup>42</sup>And whoever gives one of these *little ones* [a Christian] even a cup of cold water *because he is a disciple*, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

\*How are you doing? This is how you flesh your love for Jesus. Serve His people. You folks do so much for each other in our church family. But what Jesus is talking goes beyond our own little church, doesn't it? We are one church, one body, “elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth.” And Jesus calls us to go where the needs are. If we don't have hungry, homeless brothers and sisters here, then we need to go to where they are—

- Any of you who ever went over the hill to minister to the folks at the Redwood Gospel Mission realized right away that many of those hungry, addicted, struggling men and women - were *brothers and sisters in Christ*, right? That was Jesus. He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, in prison - and when you sat down and talked to them, and prayed with them, and gave them a Gospel of John, you did it to Jesus.

And those who will inherit the Kingdom of God served Jesus by serving His people. Mercy doesn't *determine* your eternal destiny, but it *demonstrates* it. “*Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive - mercy.*”

Before we look at the goats, let me make a two more quick observations—

1.) This passage demolishes the prosperity Gospel of Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, and others. “It's God's will that His children are healthy and wealthy, with big homes and obedient kids.” Liars! To follow Jesus, *for many of our brothers and sisters around the world*, means to be hungry and homeless and barely surviving - “the least of these My brothers.” End of prosperity gospel.

2.) You might wonder: If the least of these are Christians, then what is the difference between them and the sheep who served them? There is no difference. We're all in the same crowd on that day: sometimes we are the givers, and sometimes we are the receivers, right?

### III. The goats before Jesus.

- Matthew 25:41-45 <sup>41</sup>“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry

and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

It’s hard to even imagine Jesus saying this to people you see every day. You chat with them at the coffee shop. They cut your hair, deliver your mail. They are family members. They might be some of you. But this day is coming, and Jesus is so merciful to tell us before it happens. If you are hearing these words and you’ve never come to Jesus for salvation - please don’t wait. You do not want to be in the wrong group on that day.

Now the goats might be very good people. Maybe they never stole or committed adultery, or blasphemed God. Do you notice here that Jesus doesn’t condemn them for sins of *commission*, but sins of *omission* - it’s what they *didn’t* do that shows they never knew Him. And they didn’t love and serve lowly and needy Christians, because they didn’t love Christ.

\*Go back to that couple I told you about, Jay and Lauren. By the world’s standards, they were the best of the best. Good people, and they believed that we are all good people. But if you had asked them, “Do you believe that we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but He sent His Son to be the Savior for sinners?” They would have said, “Absolutely not! People who are good, don’t need to be saved!” Whatever good things they did, they didn’t love God. They rejected His Word, His Son, and His salvation. That is evil.

Let me read it again—

- Matthew 10:42 <sup>42</sup>And whoever gives one of these little ones (Christians) even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

And that is the unmistakable mark of a Christian—

- 1 John 4:20-5:1 <sup>20</sup>If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup>And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. <sup>1</sup>Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

If you love Jesus, you love your brothers and sisters in Christ. But if you are indifferent to them and their needs, if you don’t want to be around them or worship with them - you don’t love Jesus. And you won’t spend eternity with Him and His people. And look at what Jesus says about—

#### IV. Eternity.

- Matthew 25:46 <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

All of life boils down to this, doesn’t it? All of mankind will ultimately be divided into just two groups, sent to two eternal destinations. And their destinies will be determined by what they did with Jesus Christ - demonstrated by the way they treated His people - because ultimately, that’s how they treated *Him*.

I struggle to think of anyone going away into eternal punishment. I can't wrap my mind around it, but the same Jesus who saved me by His grace and will love me forever is the One who says this. So I have to take it by faith.

Now some of you know that many people today deny what Jesus teaches here. These people say that the doctrine of eternal, conscious, torment is too terrible to be true. A loving God just wouldn't do that. So it must be that the ones on his left just cease to exist. This is called "annihilationism."

But both the punishment and the life are *eternal*. You just can't say that heaven is forever, but hell isn't. And the *suffering* of unbelievers will be eternal:

- Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night . . .
- Revelation 20:10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
- Revelation 20:15 <sup>15</sup>And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

But the very next verse in Revelation begins like this: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . ." Jesus said to His sheep that He has gone to prepare a place for them! Will you be there?

Surrounded by Your glory  
What will my heart feel  
Will I dance for you Jesus  
Or in awe of You be still?  
Will I stand in your presence  
Or to my knees will I fall  
Will I sing hallelujah  
Will I be able to speak at all?  
I can only imagine.

\* \* \*

) St. Martin of Tours was born in the year 316 AD. He was a Roman soldier who was beginning to enquire about Christianity when one day he was on his horse and came across a poor beggar who pleaded for his help. He was frail and sickly and shivering in the cold and wearing just rags. Martin came down from his horse and took off his military cloak. He drew his sword, cut it in two and put half of his cloak around this poor man.

That night, Martin had a dream, and in his dream, he saw Jesus Christ standing in heaven, surrounded by angels who were exclaiming over the half cloak He was wearing. Jesus said to the angels: "Martin gave Me this."