

Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 25:31-46 | Sheep and Goats
Sunday January 11, 2025

WELCOME:

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

REVIEW:

Today, we finish one of the most challenging passages in Mathew's Gospel—the Olivet Discourse given to the Disciples on the Mount of Olives.

For the past two months, we have been studying chapters 24 and 25.

These chapters are difficult because Jesus has taught on prophecy and the End Times. *(Second Coming)* ^{Future}

Last Sunday, we examined the *Parable of the Talents*.

God, being so rich in grace and mercy, has given His children specific spiritual gifts to be His mouth, hands, and feet within the Verde Valley.

Last Week's KEYPOINTS:

1. *Jesus expects us to be productive*—we are not to ignore our spiritual gifts. We are to put them to use for building up the church, encouraging Believers, and participating in the Great Commission.
2. *Jesus expects us to be faithful with what we are given*—there were three men in the parable, and each man received a different amount of money to invest because each one had a different set of skills, talents, and abilities. It's not the amount that's important, but what we do with it.

- + 3. *Failure to use what God has entrusted to us is a grievous sin*—not using our spiritual gifts is not an option. God has gifted each of us in different ways, at different times, and in different circumstances. But there is one constant throughout: 1) Serve the Church, 2) Participate in the Great Commission. Doing nothing with your spiritual gift is sin.
- + 4. *“Saved to Serve”*
Saving faith is serving faith—we don’t serve to earn anything, we serve out of love and the joy we have for the Lord.

- + **Application:**
 - *What talents has the Lord given me?* (Spiritual Gifts Inventory)
 - *What training have I received to steward these talents appropriately?* The apostle Paul was trained. Jesus trained the Twelve. Paul says, **“Rather, train yourself in godliness”** (1 Tim. 4:7). We are not to “try” but rather be “trained.” That’s what the local church does—through discipleship.
 - *What mentors have invested in me?* The Christian life is about people. To spend one-on-one time with someone who is a little further down the path than you is so very important.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, we come to the last formal teaching of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel—*the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*.

A parable is a short story with a double meaning—a story that comes with a spiritual revelation.

But today’s story is not strictly a parable—it’s a reality check like the previous parables.

It’s a vivid description of the End Times, in which Jesus uses sheep and goats as symbols of Believers and Unbelievers.

Secondly,

Today's parable addresses three of the most hated and controversial subjects found in Scripture—the doctrines of predestination, election, and hell.

This passage includes all three!

Controversial

Why would Jesus include all three of these **very disturbing** subjects in His last parable days before the crucifixion and resurrection? Let's find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

 **Matthew 25:31**—“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

 **Matthew 25:32**—All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

 **Matthew 25:33**—He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left.

 **Matthew 25:34**—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.

 **Matthew 25:35**—“ ‘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 took me in;

 **Matthew 25:36**—I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.’

Matthew 25:37—“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’

Matthew 25:38—When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you?

Matthew 25:39—When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?’

Matthew 25:40—“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Matthew 25:41—“Then he will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!

Matthew 25:42—For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink;

Matthew 25:43—I was a stranger and you didn’t take me in; I was naked and you didn’t clothe me, sick and in prison and you didn’t take care of me.’

Matthew 25:44—“Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help you?’

Matthew 25:45—“Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Matthew 25:46—“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

These are the holy words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, infallible, sufficient, and efficacious Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

Serve the Lord with reverential awe and rejoice with trembling. (Psalm 2:11)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 25:31—“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Notice the repetition—*Glory, glorify, and glorious* are three of the weightiest theological terms Scripture uses.

Glory represents the power, might, and splendor of Almighty God.

 **Matthew 25:31**—“When the Son of Man comes in his glory,

Jesus begins with His favorite title for Himself—*the Son of Man*—which is a glorious title.

It's His favorite designation because the *Son of Man* captures Jesus's dual identity—truly divine and truly human.

Jesus presents Himself as a perfect human yet simultaneously revealing His divine authority to forgive sins, heal the sick, and raise the dead—all divine perogatives.

Yet, all of these divine perogatives were carried out in His human body.

Lastly, the *Son of Man* represents a divine human King who will judge the entire world.

 **Matthew 25:31**—“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,

This angelic language sounds familiar to us. In the Parable of the Net—

 **Matthew 13:47**—“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a large net thrown into the sea. It collected every kind of fish,

 **Matthew 13:48**—and when it was full, they dragged it ashore, sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but threw out the worthless ones.

What did Jesus call the man who buried his talent? Worthless!

 **Matthew 13:49**—So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out, separate the evil people from the righteous,

Notice how Jesus doesn't say “good”—because no one is good.

Righteous people are redeemed sinners—saved by God's grace alone.

 **Matthew 13:50**—and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Angels are divine messengers and servants—they have a very active role during the Second Coming.

 **Matthew 25:31**—then he will sit on his glorious throne.

We're going to see how the Son of Man is also the King in a minute, because it's only kings who sit on thrones.

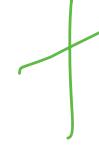
And it's only the King of kings who sits on His glorious throne.

Btw, what does Jesus look like sitting on His throne of glory?

 **Isaiah 6:1**—In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

 **Isaiah 6:2**—Seraphim were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

 **Isaiah 6:3**—And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth.

 **Isaiah 6:4**—The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke.

 **Isaiah 6:5**—Then I said: Woe is me for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips and live among a people of unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Armies.

So that's a picture of the Lord Jesus on His glorious throne today, but during His Second Coming...

 **Matthew 25:32**—All the nations will be gathered before him,

The word “nations” is interesting—it’s the Greek noun *éthnos*. (Ethnicity)

This means that the nations will be gathered before Jesus, but He will judge them as individuals.

No one is graded on a curve! We are judged by the standard of God’s perfect righteousness.

The fact that this passage says “all the nations” makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of the final judgment.



Matthew 25:32— and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

This image was familiar to the Apostles.

Sheep and goats grazed together by day, and many times, from a distance, you can't tell the difference between the two until you get closer.

However, shepherds knew their flocks and separated them by night because goats needed more warmth—goats don't have that nice wool sweater that the sheep have!

This passage uses figurative language drawn from the prophet Ezekiel.



Ezekiel 34:17—“ ‘As for you, my flock, the Lord God says this: Look, I am going to judge between one sheep and another, between the rams (male sheep) and goats.

This separation means that Jesus' throne is a throne of judgment.

That's not a popular teaching today.

We live in a world that believes in salvation by death—in other words, all you have to do to go to heaven is die.

That is not what Jesus teaches.

Each of us must stand before Jesus and give an account of our lives.



Matthew 25:33—He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left.

Scripture attaches symbolic weight to directional references—right and left.

We see this in Genesis 48, when Jacob blesses Joseph's sons.

The right hand is also linked with divine power. *in the Psalms.*

 **Psalm 16:11**— You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.

In terms of moral and spiritual judgment, “left” was considered foolish, while “right” was associated with fortune, success, and salvation.

 **Ecclesiastes 10:2**—A wise person’s heart goes to the right, but a fool’s heart to the left.

In the NT, sitting at a person’s right hand signifies a special place of honor.

 **Matthew 26:64**—“But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

So Jesus separates people to the right and left.

 **Matthew 25:34**—Then the King will say...

Notice how Jesus transitioned titles—he went from the *Son of Man* to *King*.

 **Matthew 25:34**—Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father;

Blessed means that God chooses to invoke divine favor.

God’s children don’t bless themselves—they are blessed by God the Father.

How are they blessed?

 **Matthew 25:34**—inherit the kingdom ...

Being blessed includes an inheritance—an inheritance is a gift to family members.

A child does not earn an inheritance but receives it based on their being in the family.

That's why these parables stress the importance of being in the spiritual family.

 **Matthew 25:34**— prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

The inheritance of Heaven is not an afterthought from God but rather part of God's divine plan from the beginning.

 **Ephesians 1:4**—For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him.

 **Ephesians 1:5**—He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

 **Ephesians 1:6**—to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.

Here we see the doctrine of predestination and election.

Tragically, the doctrine of predestination causes not only confusion for many Christians but also anger.

Why are Christians so angry about God's AMAZING GRACE?!

There is no greater demonstration of God's grace than election.

No one can point to any reason why someone is chosen and why someone else is not.

It certainly is not because of anything anyone has ever done.

The doctrines of predestination and election are the reason we can sing “Amazing Grace.”

Now, it’s out of God’s amazing grace that we serve and give back.



Matthew 25:35—“ *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat;*

Hunger was commonplace in the ancient world.

People were not lean or trim, they were thin—because they lacked food, not because they dieted.



Matthew 25:35—*I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink;*

Water was scarce too, especially during the dry season (which lasted nearly half the year).



Matthew 25:35—*I was a stranger and you took me in;*

Travel was difficult and dangerous.

Inns were dirty and crime-ridden— yet it was dangerous to sleep in the open.



Matthew 25:36—*I was naked and you clothed me;*

“Naked” means improperly clothed.

Since clothes were expensive and most people were poor, many lacked adequate clothing.

A typical person had just a few pieces of clothing: two inner garments, two outer garments, and a warmer cloak.

A cloak is like a heavy cape—sometimes with a hood.

Matthew 25:36—*I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.'*

No hospitals

Today's prisons are like country clubs compared to those in the first century.

Prisons were dark, gloomy, and miserable places.

Very few people ever visited prisons—needless to say, there were no prison ministries like we have today.

Prison was not a place to rehabilitate criminals, but rather a holding place to punish and/or execute them.

Matthew 25:37—*"Then the righteous will answer him,*

The Greek adjective for 'righteous' is *dikaios* —'just'.

The root word is *dike*—justice.

In other words, those redeemed sinners who live rightly, according to God's ways and standards, will answer.

Matthew 25:37—*'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'*

Notice how the redeemed are surprised. Why?

Because they were unaware that their actions were so significant.

The things mentioned in these verses all deal with common, everyday needs.

There is no mention of monumental undertakings.

It's not how many churches have been planted, houses built, meals prepared, or wells dug.

Instead, Jesus is referring to the most basic of human needs: food, clothing, shelter, and companionship.

It's the little things—and the righteous person doesn't even remember doing them because they are so small.

 **Matthew 25:38**—When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you?

 **Matthew 25:39**—When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?

 **Matthew 25:40**—“And the King will answer them,

The title “King” is significant—as it’s the king who has the final word on matters. When you stand in front of the King of kings, there is no appeals court.

 **Matthew 25:40**—‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

This parable is often taken out of context—especially this verse. *“Social Gospel”*

“The least” refers to those who are most needy. (Matthew 10:42; 18:6, 10, 14; cf. Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2).

“These brothers/sisters” refers to fellow Believers—not unbelievers. (Matt. 5:22–25; 12:48–50; 28:10).

 **Matthew 12:46**—While he was still speaking with the crowds, his mother and brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to him.

Matthew 12:47—Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

Matthew 12:48—He replied to the one who was speaking to him, “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?”

Matthew 12:49—Stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!”

Matthew 12:50—For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

In other words, verse 40 is a reference to Jesus’ disciples—and, by extension, all Believers/Disciples.

We see it again in Matthew 10...

Matthew 10:40—“The one who welcomes you welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me.”

Matthew 10:41—...anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he’s righteous will receive a righteous person’s reward.

Righteous = Redemer

Matthew 10:42—And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward.”

Jesus is specifically referring to believers.

This does not mean that we are unconcerned about unbelievers who are poor or need help. We are.

But that is not the thought here.

Jesus is not speaking of benevolence to the poor and suffering in general, but of kindness to His Brothers and Sisters who are poor and suffering.

 **Matthew 25:41**—“Then he will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed.'

Cursed—refers to divine harm. Why?

Because there is also a level of human responsibility.

People are commanded to repent and believe in the Gospel! 

So, Jesus begins to reverse everything He told the righteous.

 **Matthew 25:41**— *into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!*

This is interesting—Jesus points to how the preparation of hell reflects His response to Satan's cosmic rebellion.

Now, it's also a place for people who choose to defy divine authority—they inherit not the Kingdom of Heaven, but Hell because they share the devil's character.

 **Matthew 25:42**—*For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink;*

 **Matthew 25:43**—*I was a stranger and you didn't take me in; I was naked and you didn't clothe me, sick and in prison and you didn't take care of me.'*

Notice this—these people are judged not because of some great evil.

Jesus isn't referring to people like Adolph Hitler or Ted Bundy.

He's referring to everyday people who refused to do something good for Christians.

Therefore, when the judgment comes, they are astonished.

They are like the foolish bridesmaids who cannot understand why the groom will not open the door for them, or the wicked slave who cannot understand why the Lord is angry because he wasted his God-given talent.

 **Matthew 25:44**—“Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help you?’

These people are also surprised, but in a different way.

The implication here seems to be that if they had seen Jesus in need, they certainly would have helped Him.

But by failing to help Christians, they failed Christ—in the same way, when they persecute Christians, they persecute Christ.

Do you remember a fire-breathing, Christian-hating Pharisee named Saul?

 **Acts 9:4**—Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

 **Acts 9:5**—“Who are you, Lord?” Saul said. “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting,” he replied.

 **Matthew 25:45**—“Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

 **KEYPOINT 1:**

Salvation is by God's grace, but service is the evidence that we are saved.

The entire NT testifies that Christians are saved by faith alone, but that God given faith is never alone.

Our service either proves that we're Christians or not.

 **Matthew 25:46**—“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Jesus uses the same word to describe the duration of the unbeliever's punishment in hell as he does to describe the duration of the Believer's life in heaven.

It is the word eternal—*aiōniōs* (ahee-o'-nee-os), which means everlasting and indefinite.

Jesus uses the same word to describe salvation and judgment—blessings and curses.

If believers will be in heaven with God forever, unbelievers will be in hell, apart from God's grace, forever.

We just had another well-known Christian denounce the doctrine of hell and its eternity.

These folks teach annihilationism—where unbelievers will be extinguished, while the Believers will be in Heaven forever.

Jesus answers that argument in this sentence—*eternal* punishment.

The reason people have such a problem with an eternal punishment is the same reason they have a problem with predestination and election—“It's not fair!”

Who are we to have the final say on what is fair and what is not?

In all three of these doctrines (predestination, election, and hell), they don't understand:

1. The holiness of a Holy God.
2. The depravity of our sin.

People have claimed that eternal suffering is inconsistent with the goodness of God —yet it is the Son of God who talks more about hell than anyone else in Scripture.

No picture of hell is more sobering than what Jesus portrayed.

Others have argued that suffering for eternity is inconsistent with the justice of God, because no sin could ever deserve such a severe sentence.

Timeout! There is no one fairer than Jesus as a judge.

KEYPOINT 2:

Sin deserves eternal punishment because it's committed against an eternal God.

Everybody is a theologian—we must choose if we're going to be a good one, standing on the Word of God, or a bad one, believing in man-made religion.

Religion is man's way to get to God—or so people think.

The question is not how we respond to doctrines that are tough to swallow—predestination, election, and hell—but what Jesus and the rest of Scripture actually teach about it.

Jesus makes it clear that on Judgment Day, there are going to be some surprises.

Remember what Paul said to the people in Athens:

 ***Acts 17:30 NLT***—“God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him.”

 ***Acts 17:31 NLT***—“For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

The wonder is not that Jesus will some day come in glory to judge the world, but that He first came to save sinners.

Luke 19:10—For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.

KEYPOINT 3:

The marvel is not that Jesus promises to judge unbelievers, but that He first offers them forgiveness and freedom.

APPLICATION:

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