

Sheep and Goats

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[0:00] Since arriving at verse 42 of Matthew chapter 24 a couple of weeks ago we've seen a series of parables to illustrate that nobody knows the precise timing that Jesus' second coming will happen.

we wait for the rapture and the second coming. The parable of the faithful and wise servant showed us that we should be ready for Jesus to come at any moment. The parable of the ten bridesmaids showed us that we should be prepared even if Jesus' coming is delayed longer than we would expect. And the parable of the talent showed us what we should be doing until the Lord returns. And of course, that showed that we should be working for the advancement of his kingdom. The parables all have different scenarios, but the end result is the same for each. When Jesus returns, unbelievers will have no more second chances.

Listen to the fate of the evil servant in Matthew 24, 50, and 51. It said, The master of the servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Compare that one to the fate of the foolish bridesmaids who ran out of oil for their lamps. This is Matthew 25, 10 through 12.

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Afterward, the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.

[1:58] Then the wicked and lazy servant in the parable of the talents heard these words in Matthew 25, 30, and cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We're going to finish the Olivet Discourse tonight by looking at the passage concerning the sheep and the goats. This passage sounds a lot like a parable, but it's not a parable. It's actually a prophetic statement about what will happen when Jesus comes again. The parables have alluded to judgment, even while concentrating on how to live rightly in this life. Finally, Jesus concentrates on that judgment itself, even while alluding to the necessary preparation. Said another way, in the previous passages, preparations were the primary focus. In tonight's passage, that judgment is the primary focus.

Let's go ahead and read verses 31 through 46 of chapter 25. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And the king will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. Then he will also say to those on the left hand, depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not take me in. Naked and you did not clothe me. Sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

Then they also will answer him, 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? Then he will answer them, saying, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

[4:59] And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. We'll break the verses into five sections tonight, beginning with just verse 31.

And in verse 31, we see vindication. So vindication is what goes into your first blank. Verse 31, again, is the verse that says, When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with

him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

Who is Jesus talking about when he references the Son of Man? He is talking about himself. You're right. The most common title Jesus used for himself was the Son of Man.

And that title affirmed his incarnation, his identity with mankind, his time of humiliation, and his sacrifice. It also reflected how he condescended to come down to become a man and how he was submissive and humble at the same time.

It also showed his meekness and his gracious love for fallen humanity. Think about how the world views Jesus, though. We live in a time where fewer and fewer people believe that Jesus was and is God.

[6:21] If we examine the views of people who claim to believe that Jesus is God, we find that an even smaller percentage of those people actually have an orthodox view. But when Jesus comes the second time, people will know that he is God as he claimed to be.

Let's remind ourselves of the timing of this second coming. The section here describes the judgment of the nations, which is to be distinguished from the judgment seat of Christ and also the great white throne judgment.

The judgment seat of Christ is a time of review and reward for believers only, and it will take place after the rapture. The judgment of the great white throne takes place in eternity after the millennium. The wicked dead will be judged and consigned to the lake of fire permanently. What we're talking about here is the judgment of the nations, and it takes place on earth after Christ comes to reign. In other words, the judgment Jesus refers to in verse 31 takes place after the tribulation, but before Jesus' millennial reign. So believers that were here when Jesus came for the rapture will be gone, but there will be new believers that have come about during the tribulation, and we'll talk about that a little bit more later.

[7:45] We've alluded to it already, but consider just how different Jesus' second coming will be from his first coming. Few people noticed his humble first coming.

Most people still miss the significance. Of that first coming today. But his second coming will be unmistakable. I put this quote from John Calvin in your handout.

He said it this way. Jesus will appear openly to establish perfect order in heaven and earth, to crush his enemies under his feet, to assemble his believing people to partake of an everlasting and blessed life, to ascend his judgment seat, and, in a word, there will be a visible manifestation of the reason why the kingdom was given to him by the Father.

Jesus says that he will come in his glory, because while he dwelt in this world as a mortal man, he appeared in the despised form of a servant. And he calls it his glory, though he elsewhere ascribes it to his Father, but the meaning is the same, for he means simply the divine glory, which at that time shone in the Father only, for in himself it was concealed.

The first time Jesus came, he came quietly to a feeding trough. The second time, he will have all of the holy angels with him. The good news for us, though, is that the Lord won't come only with his angels, but also with his saints.

[9:15] The Old Testament saints, the saints of the church who will have died, the saints who will have been raptured, and the saints who will have been martyred during the tribulation, all will accompany Christ, and join the saints still living on the earth, when he descends to earth for the second time, to establish his millennial kingdom.

If you're paying attention to the text, you're probably thinking, where did you get that from verse 31? Verse 31 doesn't say it, but listen to Colossians 3-4. Paul wrote this to the Colossians.

He said, When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. So that is where we get that the saints will accompany Christ.

Before we leave verse 31, though, look at something else. Where is Jesus going to be sitting?

Yeah. And verse 31 says that he will sit on the throne of his glory, and that throne will be in Jerusalem, which was the site of David's throne.

Until this point in his ministry, Jesus had never directly referred to himself as king. He'd told a parable about a king who represented God the Father, but not until now, when he's talking privately with the twelve, did he speak of himself as king.

[10:37] We know that for a long while, the Jewish people, and certainly their leaders, knew that Jesus claimed to be a kind of king, because he claimed to be the Messiah. It was because they hoped that as Messiah, he would conquer Rome and reign over delivered Israel, that they had acclaimed him during the triumphal entry.

There was no misunderstanding among the Jews that Jesus claimed to be Messiah, the coming great king, nor was there any misunderstanding that he claimed to be God's own son. But publicly, Jesus nevertheless was always judicious in the way that he made those claims, because he didn't want to needlessly incite the wrath of his enemies.

Here we see him in privacy with the disciples on the Mount of Olives, though, and he unambiguously declared that he, the Son of Man, would one day take his rightful place as the great king and judge.

The point of this account is that, sitting on his glorious throne, he'll reign over the earth, and that his first act as sovereign Lord will be to decide who enters his millennial earthly kingdom and who does not.

That brings us to the second section of the lesson, and in that section, we see the separation. That separation will be the separation of believers from unbelievers.

[12:01] The sovereign judge over the separation will be Christ himself, the Son of Man. Before we look at the verses we're focusing on tonight, listen to what Jesus said in John 5.22.

Jesus said there, For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son. We're about to see the Son start executing that judgment.

Look at Matthew 25.32 and 33 again. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats, and he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Apparently, his judgment is going to be instantaneous at the moment he appears. When that occurs, the opportunity for faith in him will be passed. So just like we looked at in the parable of the virgins, when the bridegroom comes, the door is going to be shut, and when the Lord comes to earth in glory with his angels and saints, there will be no opportunity for unbelievers who are then alive to receive him as the Messiah.

The first thing we need to understand about the judgment scene here is what Jesus means by the word that's translated as nations in our text. That word translated as nations has the basic meaning of peoples, and here it means every person alive on the earth when Jesus returns.

[13:39] We mentioned earlier that Jesus will have taken believers into heaven at the rapture, but during the following seven years of the tribulation, many other people will come to believe in him.

Even during that dreadful time, multitudes of Gentiles, as well as all surviving Jews, will be brought to faith in Christ. The separation of the sheep and goats also alludes to Ezekiel 34, 17.

So listen to Ezekiel 34, 17. That verse says, And as for you, O my flock, says the Lord God, behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats.

That's a common picture for the people living in Jesus' day because Palestinian shepherds frequently had to separate their flocks this way. Sheep and goats freely intermingled, and from a distance, they often looked pretty similar to each other.

We too probably couldn't guess from our superficial knowledge and external appearance who are truly God's people. The encouragement for us is that we don't have to guess who God's people are.

[14:48] He already knows, and he's going to take care of that himself. We need to remind ourselves again that even though we're talking about sheep and goats, that's just an illustration.

This is an actual event that's coming in the future. We looked at parables the last couple of weeks, but this is a prophetic prophecy of what is actually coming in the future.

So the sheep are going to be placed on Jesus' right hand. The goats will be placed on Jesus' left. His right hand refers to a place of honor. The left refers to a place of disgrace.

We'll see that as we go on through the passage. After he's finished separating all of the people, Jesus will address each group. And that address starts in verse 34.

Verses 34 through 40 are our next section, and we see a commendation from Jesus. So we'll look at that commendation in sections, starting with verses 34 through 36.

[15:56] Here are 34 through 36 again. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me.

I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me. Jesus here again unequivocally says that the Son of Man who sits on the glorious throne is also the Son of God, the divine King.

Notice how Jesus starts his address to the people on his right hand. He says, Come, you blessed of my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Just like in real sheep, where sheep's wool made them more valuable than goats, Jesus is going to choose the sheep to represent those individuals who are blessed by God to inherit his kingdom.

[17:02] And this terminology, then, that he uses, underscores that their salvation is a gracious gift of God because he says that their place was prepared for them from the creation of the world.

That's an important point for us to see here because their destination is not something that they merited. They were chosen by God and ordained to be holy, predestined to be conformed to Christ's image.

So the deeds that Jesus commends in verses 35 and 36 are the fruit of their salvation. The deeds are not the root of their salvation.

So the deeds are not the basis for their entrance into the kingdom, but the deeds just merely manifest God's grace in their lives. They still can be objective criteria for judgment, though, because they're the evidence of saving faith.

You know, Jesus apparently anticipated the salvation by works interpretations that would come out of verses 35 through 45 because the Lord made clear that believers will not inherit the kingdom based upon the good deeds that they will or will not have performed on earth.

[18:14] Their inheritance was determined countless ages ago from the foundation of the world.

Those who enter the kingdom will do so on the basis of their being blessed by the Father because of the trust in His Son.

They can in no way earn a place in the kingdom on their own. And that's why the analogy fits here, too, because a child doesn't earn an inheritance, but he receives the inheritance on the basis of being part of a family.

So in the same way, a believer doesn't earn his way in the kingdom of God, but receives it as his rightful inheritance as a child of God and as an heir with Jesus Christ.

If a person hasn't trusted in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, though, no amount of seemingly good works done in Christ's name will give him any spiritual benefit. To such people, Jesus will say, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. And that's from Matthew 7, 23. Nevertheless, the genuinely righteous deeds Jesus mentions in verses 35 and 36 are measurable evidence of salvation, and that's why he commends those who have performed them.

[19:29] If you look at those deeds, the Lord lists six representative areas of need. He talks about being hungry, being thirsty, being a stranger, being naked, being sick, and being in prison.

The kingdom is for those who have ministered to such needs in the lives of God's people because those good deeds evidence true living faith. They are characteristic of God's children and kingdom citizens.

We'll take a little bit of a detour here for a second just to show you and remind you that we find that same teaching in other parts of the Bible. Remember what James wrote in James 2, 15-17.

He said, If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James' statement there is even more harsh than it first appears because depart in peace, be warmed and be filled is heartless and a foolish statement by which James indicates an attitude of total disregard for the welfare of others.

[20:52] People rarely say such words, but they often imply that sentiment by a selfish disinterest that doesn't give to others what they need. When James talks about departing in peace, it's really equivalent to just walking up to somebody and saying, God bless you.

And when he says, Be warmed and be filled, it's like he's saying, God take care of you, while the person saying it really has no intention of being a channel for that blessing.

And when he says, Be warmed and filled, the construction of the Greek there really suggests an even more cruel and sarcastic attitude because in effect, he's really saying, Warm and feed yourself.

And of course, if the person could do that, he would have done it already. The Apostle John also had a similar message. Listen to 1 John 3, 17 and 18.

1 John 3, 17 and 18 say, But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

[22:01] My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. Just from those excerpts, can you tell that James and John had spent some time with Jesus?

We're pretty consistent in what we see in the Bible. And let's go back to tonight's text and look at the remainder of the commendation section. Remember that Jesus had just told the believers, Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

I was in prison and you came to me. Then verses 37-39 have the believers reaction. 37-39 say, Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink?

When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And the king will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me.

[23:30] In verse 37, Jesus describes the sheep as righteous. And the king addresses them as righteous, not simply because they have been declared righteous in Christ, but because they have been made righteous by Christ.

The works of service to fellow believers give evidence that they are themselves the product of divine workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Of course, you recognize that last part as Ephesians 2.10, but how would you describe the reaction of the righteous there? They are surprised, and understandably so, they're surprised, because remember, we've talked about these people being the people who are alive on the earth when Jesus comes at the end of the tribulation.

Those people weren't alive when Jesus was here the first time, so their obvious question has to be summarized as, when did we do those things for you?

You weren't even here. But believers during the tribulation, especially during the devastating last three and a half years of the great tribulation, will have great need of the basics that Jesus has just mentioned.

[24:54] Because of their identity with Christ, they'll often be hungry, thirsty, and without decent shelter or clothing. they'll also be sick and in prison and alienated from the mainstream of society.

Think about this, though. Those who will have met the needs of fellow believers will themselves have suffered great needs, because few, if any, believers during the frightful days of the tribulation will be able to give out of abundance.

Most of them will barely have enough resources to meet their own needs. But their divinely inspired generosity to each other will set them apart as the Lord's people, even before as returning king, he declares them to be his own.

And that's why Jesus says, when you do these things for my people, it's as if you're doing them for me. Do we really stop and think about when we help other Christians, it's like we're helping Christ himself?

Do you think it might change our attitude a little bit if we thought about that more often? the response of those who the king commends is remarkable and it's also another proof of their salvation.

[26:08] They ministered to others in a spirit of humility and selflessness not to be seen and honored by men. They even seemingly have forgotten about the many things they've done and they're surprised that those things are even worthy of such mention by Jesus.

So far, we've seen the vindication, the separation, and the commendation. Jesus next turns his attention to the people identified as goats.

They are about to receive condemnation. Verses 41 through 45 have that condemnation. We'll read just 41 through 43 first.

42 then he will also say to those on the left hand, depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not take me in. Naked and you did not clothe me.

[27 : 15] Sick and in prison and you did not visit me. What do you notice about these verses? Well, the people mentioned here downgraded obviously because they had just the opposite response of the ones who Jesus commended earlier when through the needs of his people Jesus was hungry, thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison.

The unbelievers refused to minister to him. By doing that, they proved that they did not belong to him and they are accursed because they rejected Christ just as those who enter the kingdom are righteous because they accepted Christ.

So the unbelievers' rejection of Christ left them in a state where they weren't able to do righteous deeds. So what's the destination for these unsaved people?

Separation from Christ. He says they're going to go in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Just like Mike said, he's speaking of eternal separation from God and from God's goodness, righteousness, along with his truth, joy, peace, and every other good thing.

Jesus is speaking of eternal association with the devil and his angels in the place of torment that God prepared for them. He's speaking of eternal isolation where there'll be no fellowship, no consolation, and no encouragement.

[28 : 58] He's speaking of eternal duration and eternal affliction from which there's going to be no relief. Predictably, the goats are going to be very disturbed by this punishment.

Look at their reaction in verse 44. Then they also will answer him 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?

That question sounds very similar to what the sheep ask. At this point, the goats very much want to be sheep, but we'll find out that they can't pull the wool over Jesus' eyes.

Verse 45 has the answer that proves that last statement. Then he will answer them. Of course, this is Jesus talking to them. Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

The reason for their condemnation is that they're guilty of sins of omission. That is, they refuse to show compassion to the least of these, which is the same as if they had failed to care for Jesus himself.

[30 : 18] Given the evident unrighteousness of their hearts, then they have that condemnation. The marks of lostness that Jesus mentions here are not gross sins committed, but simple acts of kindness that were not committed.

The five foolish virgins that we looked at last week who had no oil for their lamps were shut out of the wedding feast not because they were morally wicked, but because they were unprepared for the bridegroom.

In the same way, the slave that had one talent was not cast into outer darkness because he embezzled the master's money, but because he failed to invest it. In the same way, a person who's shut out of the kingdom of God is not condemned because of the greatness of his sin necessarily, but because of the absence of his faith.

We have one more section to cover tonight. Like the first section, it covers a single verse. Verse 46 gives us the summarization.

Let's look at that summarization. Jesus says, And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

[31 : 37] We can't see it from the New King James version that I've been using tonight that Jesus uses the same word to describe the length of salvation and the length of condemnation.

Listen to how the English Standard version renders verse 46. The ESV says, And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

The sheep and the goats both have an eternal fate. The goats get eternal punishment, and the sheep get eternal life. So that's an important thing to remember.

The sheep and goats both have an eternal fate. The goats get eternal punishment. The sheep get eternal life. Think about that reward for the righteous for a minute.

The righteous are going away into eternal life to spend all of eternity glorified with their Lord and Savior. That's a marvelous contrast to the prospect of the accursed, because at the end of the thousand year earthly kingdom to come, the righteous are going to discover that their eternal blessedness has just begun.

[32:49] So at the beginning of tonight's study, we mention that the focus of tonight's passage would be on judgment. That's pretty obvious from the text. No one in Scripture talked more about judgment than Jesus.

He spoke in various places of sin that cannot be forgiven, of the danger of losing one's soul forever, of spending eternity in the torments of hell, of existing forever in outer darkness where there will be perpetual weeping and gnashing of teeth.

No pictures of judgment are more intense and sobering than what Jesus portrayed. But nothing Jesus said or did was inconsistent with his love. Here's why I can say that.

His warnings of judgment and punishment were acts of love, divine appeals for men to turn away from their sin in order to escape the condemnation that would otherwise be inevitable.

One of love's supreme desires is to protect those it loves from harm. So listen to that last sentence again, one of love's supreme desires is to protect those it loves from harm.

[34:02] The Bible makes clear that all sin is known to God and that all sin must be punished. The marvelous and gracious privilege granted to Christians, however, is to have had the judgment and punishment for all our sins placed upon the Lord Jesus Christ who died as the substitute for sinners.

By God's divine grace working through their obedient trust in his Son, believers have the guilt and penalty for their sins nailed to the cross with Christ who made atonement sufficient for the sins of the whole world, that is, the whole world who will believe in him.

Paul said it this way in Colossians 2, 13 and 14, he said, and you being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he has made alive together with him having forgiven you all trespasses having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us which was contrary to us and he has taken it out of the way having nailed it to the cross.

And of course we're just getting ready in a few weeks to celebrate his nailing our sins to the cross. Considering the perfect holiness of the almighty God and the persistent sinfulness and ungodliness of man, it's not the Lord's judgment that is amazing, but rather his coming in grace to offer salvation. The wonder is not that Jesus will one day come in glory to judge the world, but that he first came in humility to save sinners. Along the same lines, the marvel is not that God promises to condemn sinners for their sin, but that he first offers them deliverance from it.

[35:48] In coming to save those who trust in him, the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his great love for the unlovely by bearing the penalty of their sin and dying the death that they deserve.

What's remarkable is that he came to redeem sinners who are worthy only of his judgment. Listen to that last part again. In coming to save those who trust in him, the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his great love for the unlovely by bearing the penalty of their sin, dying the death they deserve.

What is remarkable is that he came to redeem sinners who are worthy only of his judgment.

Believers never have to worry about being one of the goats.

As Paul wrote in Romans 5, 8, and 9, God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, much more than having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

The same words Jesus will speak to believers at the judgment of the sheep and goats are applicable to all believers. One day, all true believers will hear Jesus say, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

[37:12] Thank you.