

Matthew 25:31–46

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 March 2024

Preacher: Joe Pace

[0 : 0 0] Again, that's Matthew 25, 31-46. Please stand as you're able for the reading of God's word.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 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.

And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left. 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.

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. I was naked, and you clothed me.

I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

[1 : 0 5] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? 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.

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. 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 welcome me. Naked, and you did not clothe me. Sick and in prison, and you did not visit me.

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? 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.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

[2 : 2 1] Well, good morning, and again, let me add my word of welcome to Christ Church Chicago this morning.

It's good to see you here, and have you here with us. In the spirit of our guest, Pastor Walter Carter, who was here a couple of weeks ago, you can talk back to me.

It is okay, and you can say amen. That's fantastic. Fantastic. Old MacDonald had a farm. E-I-E-I-O. And on this farm, he had some sheep. E-I-E-I-O.

With a ba-ba here and a ba-ba there, here a ba, there a ba, everywhere a ba-ba. This classic children's song, designed to help with language development, takes us on a tour around Mr. McDonald's farm, identifying the animals he has and the sounds they make.

[3 : 5 1] However, in almost every single version of this song, there is one animal that's not mentioned. It's the goat.

It's not because there aren't any goats on a typical farm. No, it's because sheep and goats remarkably make virtually the same sound.

making it difficult to distinguish one from the other, though they are very different animals indeed.

In the context of the ancient world, the first century, and even in some places today, goats and sheep were common livestock and would be herded together in the same field, in the same pasture.

The shepherd, however, had to be careful because though they may sound alike, there was something about the behavior of the sheep and the goats that was very different.

[5 : 08] The sheep are docile, gentle, and obedient creatures, while goats can be stubborn, unruly, and independent. Sheep generally graze and eat where they are led, while goats have huge appetites and will eat anything and everything to satisfy their hunger.

This behavior caused the animals not to be able to feed or rest well together. So the shepherd often had to separate the sheep from the goats for grazing and for sleeping at night.

Today, in our text, we will see that a day is coming when another shepherd, the good shepherd, King Jesus, will also by virtue of their behavior and actions, separate the sheep from the goats.

Only this separation will have eternal consequences. To be clear, I'm not talking about old McDonald farm animals this morning.

These sheep and goats metaphorically represent me and you. Indeed, they represent all mankind.

[6 : 47] With that, my question for you this morning is simple. Sheep, goats, and the kingdom. Where will you stand?

Where will you stand? If I were to bottom line this text and really get to the main point, it would simply be this. Judgment is coming.

Eternity is forever. And where you spend it is all about what kind of pasture you choose to graze in.

This passage in Matthew represents the conclusion of what is called the Olivet Discourse. Before then, heading straight to the events that would lead ultimately to Jesus' crucifixion.

In the text preceding this one, as you've heard in previous weeks, Jesus has been warning, warning, warning of the need to get ready and to be ready for the last day when he returns.

[7 : 59] In this passage, Jesus now describes what that last day is going to be like. What final judgment is going to look like.

No more getting ready. But ready or not, here he comes. where will you stand?

This description of final judgment in this text really plays out in three ways I'd like to live for our time together this morning. First, there will be an eternal separation.

There will also be an eternal reward. And there will be an eternal punishment. perhaps even more intriguing is the common thread we'll discover that runs through all three of these.

It's the behavior of those who are supposed to be serving Jesus. The eternal separation verses 31 through 33, our passage opens with a description first of who is doing the separating.

[9 : 14] the son of man coming in his glory and all the angels with him and he will be seated on his glorious throne. Now, this picture, this verbiage is not new.

It actually draws from and expands on the vision that Daniel had back in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14. You don't have to turn there but let me read it for you.

I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man and he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. And we sing behold our God seated on his throne come let us adore him.

Further, if you've been tracking with us through the gospel of Matthew Jesus uses this term son of man frequently when referring to himself.

[10 : 36] son of man is a title of humanity humility deity and it is a fulfillment a prophecy. What I'm trying to make clear is that this isn't some random guy or religious leader sitting on this throne doing this separating.

This is Jesus himself the Messiah the Savior the King of Kings the Lord of Lords. it is he who presides over this gloriously grand and cosmic assembly even including the entire celestial realm.

Then with all the nations every person every tongue every tribe gathered in front of him Jesus begins to separate the sheep from the goats.

placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Notice how in this royal courtroom!

Judge Jesus is not holding hearings to determine who is a sheep or who is a goat. that's already been determined.

[12 : 00] Now he's just separating. All the nations all humanity divided into just two groups.

There's no other evidence to present it doesn't matter where you're from what you do for a living how much money you have what school you went to what denomination you grew up. you could have Perry Mason Ben Matlock Jack McCoy those are all famous TV lawyers young people that you may not be familiar with.

It would not matter. All that will matter is the behavior of those who are supposed to be serving Jesus.

Where will you stand? for those of you who may not know Jesus as your personal savior or are not sure which pasture you're grazing in this morning this is a great day for you to make that choice clear to give your life to him to follow him to serve him I'd love to show you how why because today Jesus still stands at the door and knocks waiting patiently to enter as savior to any heart that will take him in but another day is coming a day of glory and a day of solemn judgment the throne will be set up the king will take his place and the judgment of the nations will begin so I know the question now is well who are the sheep and who are the goats and how do I determine which one

I am great questions we can find some of the answers by first looking at how the sheep are rewarded and why it's the eternal reward verses 34 through 40 starting at verse 34 Jesus the king says to the sheep on his right come you who are blessed by my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world who wouldn't want to be sheep you're blessed favored by the father and you inherit some property that was prepared for you before time began a place full of joy of peace of beauty no more sorrow no more sickness no more suffering the old spiritual says always howdy howdy and never goodbye forever and ever and ever that's the reward for the sheep so pastor joe i get it that sounds great but what did the sheep have to do to get in on the reward what do i have to do well here comes the unexpected part of the story in outlining the criteria the evidence he's using to make this judgment jesus doesn't say a thing about faith salvation grace being born again any of the spiritual disciplines like bible reading prayer evangelism or church attendance there's nothing about adult education community groups or which college you attended even if it was wheaton it's as if all those things don't matter at all that is to say all the things we normally associate with going to heaven are not even mentioned here here it is are you ready to get the reward you have to serve jesus by serving others wow wait you serve jesus by serving others here it is verses 35 and 36 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 i was naked and you clothed me i was sick and you visited me i was in prison and you came to me wow confused don't worry so were the sheep so they asked the king for some clarification verses 37 through 39 lord when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink and when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you and when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you they're asking in essence what any one of us may ask how did we feed jesus clothe jesus give jesus something to drink when we can't physically see jesus and wait this is jesus we're talking about he couldn't possibly need food or clothes or drink he's jesus and when did he get a prison record he's jesus jesus the king answers them and us in verse 40 truly i say to you as you

[17 : 54] did it to one of the least of these my brothers you did it to me in other words how you treat serve and meet the needs of others the least of these is how you serve jesus not out of sense of duty or obligation but out of genuine love and concern for the welfare of others this makes a lot of sense because jesus knew a little something about those labeled the least of these and he identified with them matthew chapter 8 verse 20 jesus says foxes have holes and birds have nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head further jesus says the least of these who's my brothers well that begs the question who are his brothers scripture gives us the answer back in chapter 12 jesus answers that and says my brothers and sisters are those who do the will of my father in heaven so though we do have a responsibility to help meet the needs in our broader local and global community you are not off the hook there jesus is even more specifically in this text referring to those right here in the household of faith it's about how you serve and strive to meet the needs of those right here among you brothers and sisters that are hurting that are sick that are desperate that looking for help and support those that might be marginalized and pushed aside those that don't have a position or a title behind their name or any visibility up here on the platform how you care for them is how you care for him i can totally relate to this concept my wife is a part of a large close extended family and before we got married a couple of her aunts pulled me to the side to talk to me they said you know when you marry her you marry all of us if you do right by her you've done right by us however if you hurt her we're all coming for you i said oh my god i'm about to marry into the corleone family from the godfather their message however was very clear and so is jesus in this text how you treat them the least of these my brothers is how you treat me so treat them well your everlasting eternal reward hangs in the balance i need to pause here for a moment because dr claire a casual reading of this passage might lead you to interpret a suggestion that salvation is the result of good works let me quickly clear that up the scripture never contradicts itself

ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 says for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of god not a result of works so that anyone may boast this doesn't change the good works in this text are not the cause of salvation they are the effect of salvation you can't do enough to earn your way into heaven however true conversion and faith in the lord jesus christ expresses itself shows itself in the concern and care for those in need john chapter 13 says by this all people will know that we are his disciples if you have love one for another caring for those in need is the logical outworking of the christian faith this sort of compassion flows out of believers heart as naturally as wool from the back of a sheep the sheep care for the least of these because to them it's natural that's the pasture they graze in and it's a matter of family honor the good things the sheep did were evidence that jesus was working in their lives this is why the sheep were rewarded but not so with the goats which leads us to the eternal punishment verses 41 through 46 verse 31 then he will say to those on his left the goats depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels what on earth is going on here with the goats

I mean the goats say amen just like the sheep the goats shout hallelujah just like the sheep the goats sing how great is our god just like the sheep but there's something very different about the behavior of the goats that led to their eternal damnation in verses 42 through 45 jesus gives the same evidence or criteria for the goats as he did the sheep he gets asked and answers the answers the same questions from the goats as he did the sheep only this time the responses are the exact opposite you did not feed me when I was hungry you did not give me drink when I was thirsty you did not clothe me when I was naked you didn't welcome me when I was a stranger you didn't even visit me when I was sick and in prison the goats were living a selfish life grazing in another field concerned only about serving themselves not serving others they saw lots of people in need but did nothing for them they looked the other way when a hand reached out for help they turned deft ears to please for assistance they were too busy to visit the sick if they did offer any help at all it was only to get praise and publicity pandering to their own self-esteem

William Barclay once said to the help which wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but the sake of helping the sheep lived by this principle the goats do not can you see it if it were possible at least one of the goats would have gone back to Jesus with some follow-up questions hey Jesus why did you just tell us it was you all along why all the disguises you coming in church like a sick person that was a good one you should have told us if we knew it was you we would have acted differently we would have done things differently you know we wouldn't have done you like that

Jesus then you can hear Jesus reply well Billy as in Billy goat well Billy the sheep didn't know it was me either yet they are being rewarded because they showed my love to everyone expecting nothing in return the contrast couldn't be more stark the way of the sheep is the way of love compassion and selflessness it is the way of seeing Christ in others and serving them accordingly it is the way of living in accordance to God's will the way of the goats is the way of selfishness of indifference and disregard for others it is the way of ignoring the needs of others and living for one self it is the way of living in disregard of God's will where friends today will you stand let me give it to you straight the goats end up in hell a place that wasn't even originally created for them they end up in hell not just because they didn't care for the king's needy brothers but because their unconcern showed that they really didn't care for the king either you can't say you love

[28 : 34] Jesus and hate your neighbor especially those right here in the body this doesn't have to be you you don't have to be a goat and be sent to a place that wasn't even prepared for you especially when there is a place a beautiful place a heavenly place a glorious place already prepared for you that exceeds all of your wildest dreams and expectations all you have to do is accept Christ and follow him and you too can be one of his sheep on the right for those of you who have accepted Christ but today maybe through the mirror of this text you see some goat like tendencies there's good news in this text because you still have time to turn it around you still have time to get it right recommit your ways to him here's the way one scholar puts it the difference between followers of Jesus and those who do not know Jesus is that those who have encountered

Jesus no longer have any excuse to avoid the least of these what a revelation judgment day will be for all of us the things we thought were so important so crucial so vital the things we included on our personal resume the degrees we earned the money we made the deals we closed the friends we cultivated in high places the buildings we built the organizations we managed the budgets we balanced maybe it's the books we wrote or the portfolios we built all of it added together means nothing what matters to Jesus these moments are the things his sheep do every day that they probably don't even remember it's a kind word a helping hand a quick phone call a word of encouragement a visit with a sick friend that's what matters to Jesus these moments whether big or small massive or minute

Jesus sees all of it and remembers it all and one day he will reward his sheep for it all no you can't go to soldier field look up in the stands and simply by observing know for certain who's saved and who's lost who's sheep and who's goats we all look pretty much the same especially from a distance we're all animals on old mcdonald's farm but the lord knows his own because he saves them one by one he knows them and loves them and calls them by name he puts his mark on them so that they will never be lost in the crowd and in the last day he will call his own from the mass of people in the world and his sheep will forever be separated from the goats where will you stand let's pray together father thank you for your word thank you for this opportunity to determine the pasture that we'll graze in thank you for this admonition this warning to get it right may we see that sheep like behavior reflected in us knowing that as we care for those who are the least of these your brothers we are caring for you

God make us better disciples better followers so that we may be those sheep on the right and enter into that place you have prepared for us your son's name we pray amen amen amen