

Being an Apostolic Church

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, so we're reading again from Matthew chapter 25 verses 31 to 46. 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 the 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? 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?

[2 : 0 9] Then he will answer them, saying, Truly I say to you, as you did not do it to 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.

It's quite impressive to be in the High Court of Australia in Canberra, and I understand even more significant to be in the Supreme Court of the United States. They're both impressive places. But no courtroom has ever been even close in being impressive to the court that's described by Jesus in Matthew 25. In this court, the judge sitting in the court is not a human being only like us, but the one who is the Lord Jesus himself, who is more than a man. He's presented here in Matthew 25, as the king of heaven and earth. And in this courtroom, we're told, or he tells us that, all the nations of the earth come before him. Verse 32, every Afghan, every American, every Argentinian, every Australian, all the nations of the world come before this judge.

And in the courtroom, there's a verdict, and there's a sentence. And every man and woman, and every boy and girl who has ever lived, hears the sentence and receives the verdict.

And having separated all those who are in front of him, all the nations, we're told in verse 34, that Jesus says to those on the right hand, on his right hand, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. And then for those on his left side, those described as like goats that are separated from sheep. He says, verse 41, depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Just two verdicts and two sentences. Come with me. Go away from me. The whole of the human race divided into those two groups.

[4 : 59] Now, Jesus' words there are so clear that even the youngest child can understand that. That's clearly what he's saying is so clearly evident, we don't have to guess about the meaning of his words.

A courtroom, a judge, a verdict, two sentences, everybody's in one category or the other. And although it's so clear and simple, these words are not popular today.

In fact, people get pretty hostile if you tell them, a lot of people do, if you tell them these things. I think there are a couple of reasons for that. And the first reason I think that the idea of judging anybody is unpopular is unpopular. It used to be that those of us who are old enough will know that the most quoted verse in the Bible used to be John 3, 16. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Most people knew it.

But now I'm told that the most quoted verse in the Bible is the verse from Matthew 7, which you've been in Matthew's Gospel for some time. You can remember back that far, judge not so that you're not judged.

It's the first quoted verse as if nobody should pass judgment or assessment on anybody else. You're free to have your opinions, but don't you dare say other people are wrong in their opinions.

[6 : 34] Don't presume to assess Roman Catholics or Muslims or Hindus. They're sincere. Don't you judge them, we're told.

Be more like Jesus, who was so loving that he accepted everybody. Well, you think about it for a minute. We don't take that view in any other part of life.

If I'm in court on a charge of speeding or arson or tax fraud or something else, whether I was sincere or not is irrelevant. Did I break the law? Our whole law system is based on the fact that some people keep the law and some people break the law. It's not a case of feeling or opinion or preference or conscience. If I'm doing the HSC science exam this week, the fact is some answers are going to be right and some are going to be wrong. It's not a case of, well, did the majority think something was right. Things are factually right or factually wrong. If I go to the doctor and he says, well, we've got the results of your test and the tumour is malignant and if we don't operate, you might have a month to live. Now, I don't want him to be guessing at that point.

I don't want him to say, well, I don't feel it's right. I want to know what is right. What are the facts? And when you go to the doctor, you want the facts. You want them to, you want to know it like it is.

If you jump off your roof, you may believe that you're free from the law of gravity, but when you hit the ground, you'll say, well, that was a stupid belief. And it was.

[8 : 39] In so many parts of life, we don't work on the basis of sincerity is what determines something or majority opinion determines something. Things are factually right or factually wrong.

It's how our law courts work. It's how our exam system works. It's what the doctor operates on the basis of is in the laws of nature. And we judge people every day by whether they observe this or fail to observe it or say this or say that. Things are just right and wrong in a hundred times a day. More than that, that's how we live.

Twice in these verses, Jesus calls himself a king. That's how he describes himself. Well, if I said to you, what kind of king would he be if he just said, well, I've told you this and this and this, but you make up your own mind and we're all equally valid.

He wouldn't be a king of any consequence if people sidelined him or spat on him or mocked his views on something. Well, he might be a king in name, but he wouldn't be a king in fact.

We can't live on the basis of how we feel. We're free to have our own feelings, but we're not free to have our own facts. And Jesus said, I'm the king and I'm the judge.

[10 : 10] And Jesus isn't king. Whatever, he just allows people to spit on him and get away with it. If he were not to judge, he'd be a liar and a fraud.

Now, people who want to say the idea of judging is unpopular, we don't want to go there, thank you. I think again, that's not how we live life. And it's certainly not what's true about the Lord Jesus himself.

I think the second reason why people don't like this picture of sheep and goats is the idea of hell is unreasonable. It may have been okay in the Middle Ages when people painted pictures of sort of fire and brimstone and devils with pitchforks and tails and all the rest of it. But, I mean, who really believes in an eternal hell in 2025? And if we have to have a hell, let's at least water it down a bit.

So it's a bit more palatable, acceptable. Let's say, well, maybe people only do a year in hell. And then they find out, you know, it's not the place to be and then they get out. Let's give people a second chance at least. Or maybe, let's not think of hell as going on and on and on and on and on forever.

Let's say, well, people are sent to hell and then they're wiped out. They're destroyed, annihilated. That sounds more reasonable to 2025 people than the idea of an eternal hell.

[11 : 53] Well, friends, that won't work if Jesus is right. In verse 46, he said, these, those that he's left, will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous on the right into eternal life. Well, if it's not eternal there, then it's not eternal there. It's the same word. If heaven is forever, then hell is forever. And it won't do to say, well, we don't like the idea of hell. We may not like it. But the question is, the issue there is that we're then opposing our views against the views of the Lord Jesus. We're so quick to give up the, well, why do you suppose we don't like the idea of an eternal hell? I'll tell you, I think the reason is because we think we're too good for it. It'd be all right for the Hamas murderers on October 7th who raped women and put children's bodies in oven and killed them. Hell would be okay for them.

Hell would be okay for the pedophiles who've just been the most wicked of people. It'd be all right for them. But 95% of Australians, we're pretty nice people. Surely, surely not hell for them.

Well, let me ask you, friends, how bad do you think it is that even once you might have said to the living God, I don't like you? Or said to the living God, my opinions are better than yours? Or said to the living God, you're not worthy of the love of my heart and mind and will and strength? I'm not going to give it to you.

If we did that just once, against the holy God of the whole world, how long do you think you'd have to be in hell to pay off that once? Against an infinitely holy God and you've spat on him?

The reason we don't like the idea of hell and we think it maybe can just be abbreviated in some way because we don't think God's really very big. That's our problem. But I tell you, friends, there are no little sins against a big God. Every sin is significant. And if you thought a day in hell could pay off just one sin, which it couldn't, against a holy God, it would take an eternity for that. How much more? All your sins.

[14 : 43] That when God is big, no sin against him is ever small. And if we think the idea of hell is unreasonable, it's only because we've got unreasonable views about God and inflated views about ourselves and ridiculous views about sin. That's where the problem lies. Not in hell, but in these other ways.

Yes, it's true. No one has ever loved like Jesus has loved. And no one has ever been more passionate for his father's honour than Jesus. And no one has ever spoken more about hell than Jesus in the Bible.

No one has ever spoken to him. And he's way ahead of everybody else, combined. Because he loves. And friends, I want to be honest with you and say this. I personally don't find hell very easy to hold as a fact. But when someone I love, someone in my family, a parent dies, a brother, they die, they're not a Christian. I find myself thinking now, can hell really be that? Can hell really be real?

Can it be eternal? There's a sense in which I have to work through it all over again because the idea of hell is horrendous. It's an awful prospect.

I don't think we should ever speak with it. I hope I'm not doing it this morning. We should never speak about hell casually or flippantly or make jokes about it. But we should speak, as Jim Packer said, whenever we speak about hell, it should be with what he called traumatic awe. It's an awful prospect.

[16 : 41] So please forgive me if I've sounded glib. I haven't wanted it to be like that. But I do want to say it's real. And it's awful. And it's forever.

Well, if judgment is reasonable and if judgment makes hell necessary, then on what basis are the sheep and the goats separated? What makes the difference? We know their destiny is different.

What is it that makes the difference in the choice, in the verdict? Well, there are two answers to that question. One is really big and it's back there.

And one flows from that and is here. And so Jesus says in verse 34, Now, who are blessed? Who are truly and deeply and blessed to the maximum?

God. Those whom, in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4, Paul says, God the Father has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

[18 : 16] The blessing, the best blessing of God that leads to the other best blessings of God is that he's elected those who are the sheep. He's chosen them before the foundation of the world.

He prepared the kingdom for them before he put a blade of grass on this earth. He prepared heaven for them and guaranteed that they would be with him, every last one of them, with the Lord Jesus in heaven. When you became a Christian, things didn't start then.

It's not as if, or the person who told you about the gospel, it didn't start then. Or the grandparent who prayed for you before you were born, it didn't start then. It started back before the foundation of the world, when the Father chose those who would be in his kingdom.

And he prepared the kingdom and he prepared salvation for them. Christ was crucified, says the book of Revelation, before the foundation of the world. It's in the plans of God, it all happened there. It's a really, really big deal.

There are so many things, friends, that are bigger than your 20 years or 40 years or 60 years or 80 years, whatever they are. So many bigger things than what's happened in your little lifespan.

[19 : 32] And this is one of them. Those on the right hand of Jesus are those whom the Father prepared a kingdom for before he did anything else in this world. And it's because of that choice that some other choices follow.

That's the second part of the answer. On what basis is this verdict made? It's made on the basis of God's sovereign, electing, predestinating grace before time.

And in time, something happens to those whom the Father has chosen. And so we read what it is here in verse 35. Let me just recap a bit for you. In 35, Jesus says, 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. And the righteous will answer him, when did we do that?

We didn't see you hungry. We didn't see you naked. We didn't see you thirsty. When did all this happen? Or when did it happen? Now, you might think that's saying it's the nice people who get to heaven.

[20 : 46] It's the people who are kind. It's the people who are generous. It's the people who donate to UNESCO for kids who are sort of in difficult situations around the world. It's the people who give the red shield appeal.

It's the people who go out of their way. That's not what Jesus is saying. That's not it. That's not it. It's just somehow that the basis on which you go to heaven is your niceness, your generosity.

It's never been like that. It's a while since, I guess, since you've been in Matthew chapter 10. Matthew 10, so you might want to just turn back there for a tick, because Jesus says some things in Matthew 10 that explain what he's meaning here, what he's saying here in Matthew 25.

Matthew 10, verse 40. Whoever receives you, receives me. Whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.

The one who receives a prophet, because he is a prophet, will receive a prophet's reward. And the one who receives a righteous person, because he's a righteous person, will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones, even a cup of cold water.

[22 : 03] That sounds like Matthew 25, doesn't it? Giving the drink to the person who's thirsty. Because he is a disciple, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. When Jesus says whoever receives you, receives me.

Who's the you? Well, let me tell you, it's not you. The word why are you in the Bible doesn't always mean you, you, you, you, you.

It sometimes has another meaning. So when Jesus is speaking in Matthew 10, whoever receives you, he's talking of his disciples, the apostles.

Whoever receives the apostles, because he's a prophet, because he's been sent with a word from God. Whoever receives the prophet, the apostle, And you receive the apostle because you received what he says.

You say, this guy's got the goods. We're going to take what he says to heart. Let's look after him. This guy's a messenger from God. And Jesus said, if you receive the apostle, you receive me.

[23 : 14] And if you receive me, you receive the father who sent me. The test on the day of judgment is not whether you've been nice. That's really important to be nice and to be generous. But that's not what he's saying.

He's actually saying something like those, the sheep on the last day, are those who have passed the Jesus test. Not the nice test. The people who've received Jesus from the apostles.

And they've proved that they've received the apostles because they've looked after the apostles who brought the message. It's a Jesus test. It's a test about belief. It's a test that's based in the Lord Jesus himself.

He's really saying, if you've received me. Now, why do I receive the Lord Jesus? Why did I? For me, age 10, non-Christian home, somebody told me about Jesus.

[24 : 20] They're linked. And this is true because this is first true. Look, I tell you, friends, in the courtroom of Jesus, no one is going to ask you, were you a good person or were you a bad person?

Did you receive the apostles' message about Jesus? Did you receive them? Receiving them? Receiving their message? Receive Jesus, who is the message?

Receive the Father who sent him? It's a Jesus test. Now, friends, we're at Grace Church.

You're good Protestants. I know that. And as good Protestants, we don't make much about people. We say it's really all about Jesus. We don't have saints and saints' days and all the rest of it.

[25 : 51] It's therefore also about the apostles whom he sends in his name. That's not you and me. No apostles here today, but those whom he selected 2,000 years ago.

So I want to urge you, dear friends, to continue to make sure that you're an apostolic church. This is what it means when we talk about the apostolic church.

We are based, we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. I don't know whether anybody here has what's called a red letter Bible.

That's where you read the gospels and the words of Jesus are all printed in red and all the other words are printed in black. That's okay. It's still the Bible.

But there's a sense in which all the words are red letter because they're all the words from Jesus. So if Paul is saying it or John is saying it or Matthew is saying it, it's because Jesus has told them what to say.

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And friends, look, it doesn't matter where you're reading. It doesn't matter whether it's red or black. Jesus has said, these are my words for all generations.

[28 : 18] Oh, but people say, well, look, you don't really expect us in 2025 to believe what you say about heaven and hell, do you?

Yes. Jesus said it and the apostles taught it. No embarrassment. It may be difficult to explain. It may be emotionally difficult to accept.

But there's no doubt about the truthfulness of it. Yes. People say, you don't expect us to believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father, do you?

There's only one road up the mountain and not several with lots of other sincere people going up the other ways. And we're all going to meet at the top. Well, yes, yes, Jesus. That's exactly the way it is that I'm the only way.

You'll get to the top and I alone will be there. I won't be there with Muhammad or Buddha or the Pope or somebody else. I alone will be there. You mean, you actually believe in the exclusiveness of Jesus?

[29 : 25] I do. I believe that our future destiny, heaven or hell, is determined by what we do with his words. Sexuality.

Other hot issues of the day. Oh, just Paul. Friends, don't shrink from that. Don't be embarrassed. Yes, Paul. Speaking by the authority of the Lord Jesus himself.

These are important things. And we take them to heart. So I want to urge you to keep being an apostolic church. A good Protestant church. Of course, that's what Protestants believe.

And then one last question, which is a bit more personal. You know, when you read the Bible, I think you can say, really, there are only two days.

Two days. There's that day when Jesus will sit on his throne. That day of judgment. That day when we're all separated into one of two groups.

[30 : 32] There's that day that Jesus so lovingly warned us about here. And there's today. I think the Bible speaks just really about those two days.

Today. And that day. And other days really don't matter so much. And if you say, today, Jesus, I love you.

And I trust you. And I follow you. I love you. I serve you. Then that day. It won't have the slightest threat for you.

That's nothing to fear. It's knowing that on that day, what you will hear will be the sweetest word you've ever heard in your whole life.

Jesus says, come. Blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you. Nothing to be afraid of on that day.

[31 : 37] When today, you can say, Jesus is my Lord. But if, while it's still today, you say, not for me, thanks.

I prefer my own way. I prefer to find my own way to the top of the mountain. I don't want to get too serious about these things that Jesus says. And I can tell you, you've got everything to fear about that day.

Whatever. That view today is the view that you hold to. And what you'll hear on that day is not come. Come.

Come. Come with me, says Jesus. The most magnificent person who's ever walked on this earth. Be with me. But no, what you'll hear is go.

Go away. Depart. Not come. Depart. Depart. A man once, a man I know, once asked a friend who told him about Jesus.

[32 : 46] He's not a Christian. He said, when should I really, when should I turn to Jesus as you've told me to? When should I embrace him as you keep telling me I should do?

And his friend said, you'd better do it the day before you die. You'd better do it the day before you die. And the guy said, I don't know when I'm going to do it, when I'm going to die.

He said, then you'd better do it today. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Sunday, October the 26th, 2025, was the day you turned from hell to heaven?