

What will happen?

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[0 : 0 0] The reading is taken from Matthew chapter 25, beginning at verse 31, which can be found on page 1002 of the Church Bibles.

Matthew 25, beginning at verse 31. Jesus said, 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 from one 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.

[1 : 1 4] 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 a 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.

[2 : 1 6] 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. Let's pray as we begin.

Amen. Thank you, Father, that you have given us your word. Please open our ears to hear, and eyes to see the truths in your word.

[3 : 2 8] And by your Holy Spirit, please give us understanding. Amen. My wife, Ashley, is a teacher. And when she steps out of the classroom, she would say to the children, I just need to pop out to the printer to fetch something really quickly.

And when I come back, I expect you all to be exactly as you are now, quietly working. And you can see this door is open, so I will be able to hear of any misbehavior.

Now, how the children will behave while she steps out is going to depend on a couple of things. One, what the children think of Ashley, for example, whether she's kind or mean, whether they are scared of her or not, and so on.

And two, what would be the consequences when they get caught for misbehaving? Now, if the children have a view of Ashley being a pushover of a teacher who has zero control and zero authority in the classroom, then they would just ignore the threatening command to behave while she's away and do whatever they want.

But if, on the other hand, the children have a view of Ashley being a teacher that they respect the authority of, then they would make sure they behave while she's away. Now, assuming the children understand Ashley's authority, knowing that she has the power to dish out rewards like compliments, good shows, as well as punishments like detentions and minus house points, then they should behave to avoid being punished.

[5 : 09] But if Ashley doesn't really have the power and the authority to actually back up the threatening commands that she's made, then the children wouldn't take her very seriously.

And essentially, that is the crux of today's talk. While we live in the now, waiting for Jesus to return, the main question that we are thinking about in today's passage is, do we have the right view of who Jesus is and what he's going to do when he returns?

Do we have the right view of who Jesus is and what he's going to do when he returns? From today and the next two Sundays, we are in the last of five blocks of Jesus' teachings found in the Gospel of Matthew.

We start at chapter 25 today and we'll work backwards. And this whole block of teaching starts at chapter 24, verse 3, where Jesus' disciples asked him, tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

So come back the next two Sundays to see Jesus' detailed answer to this question in chapter 24. But in chapter 25, Jesus used parables to explain that there will be a delay before his second coming, which then leads to today's passage in verses 31 to 46, where we see what happens once this period of delay is over.

[6 : 37] And so whether we're looking at this from the first century or now 2,000 years later after Jesus' ascension to heaven, we are faced with the same question.

Do we have the right view of who Jesus is and what he'll do when he returns? Now let's make sure we do because that will determine how we will respond to today's passage.

And so we come to our first point. Do we have the right view of who Jesus is, the king and judge? Do we have the right view of who Jesus is, the king and judge?

So let me just read verses 31 to 33 again for us. 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 the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right but the goats on the left.

[7 : 38] So when the Son of Man returns, it will be glorious. Why? The Son of Man is the title that Jesus used on many occasions to refer to himself as the prophesied king.

And he will one day return in all his glory as king, ruler over all nations. And he's not coming back alone. He will have all the angels with him as he takes his place on his glorious throne.

So just try to picture the scene that's painted here of Jesus returning as king. All nations, in other words, all peoples, every single person will be gathered before Jesus sitting on his glorious throne.

And for those of us who are looking forward to Jesus' return and have placed our hopes and trust in him, this will be such a glorious and awesome scene. However, for those who have not and have rejected Jesus, this would be an absolutely terrifying scene.

Why? Because Jesus doesn't simply return as king. He also returns as judge where people from all nations will be gathered before him and he will separate us based on whether we are a sheep or a goat.

[8 : 51] So why does Jesus compare us to sheep and goats? Well, he is the shepherd. Jesus didn't come as God's goat herder. He's the promised shepherd who has come to shepherd God's people.

Sheep intermingle with goats quite frequently, which is a common sight for you if you visit the countryside often. And shepherds may have different practical reasons for separating sheep from goats.

But Ezekiel chapter 34, verse 19, gives us a biblical view of what's wrong with goats. God says, as he judges the behavior of sheep intermingled with goats, must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

Essentially, goats make things rather unpleasant for the sheep and so they are judged by God. So just like God judging between sheep and goats in Ezekiel, Jesus will return to separate the sheep from the goats for the purpose of judgment.

And so the question we must ask ourselves is whether we have the right view of Jesus returning as both king and judge. Now there is no doubt about his return and when he does return, he will return to be king and to judge us and we cannot get this view of Jesus' identity wrong.

[10 : 14] Just imagine it being your first day on a new job and you've mistaken the CEO for a junior colleague or for those who are in school, imagine mistaking your school principal for a regular parent.

Now what's the outcome? It might be pretty embarrassing for you for a little while. However, if we get Jesus' identity as king and judge wrong, it won't just be embarrassing for a little while, it will cost us absolutely everything for eternity.

And that brings us to the next point which is, do we have the right view of what's going to happen in Jesus' judgment? Do we have the right view of what's going to happen in Jesus' judgment?

So let me read for us verses 34, 41 and 46 again. So verse 34. Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you hope who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Then verse 41. 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. And then 46.

[11 : 26] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. So what is Jesus teaching about what's going to happen in his judgment?

The hard truth that we all need to hear and to understand is that there are only two destinations. It is either going to be eternal life with Jesus in God's kingdom or eternal punishment together with the devil and his angels in the eternal fire.

Now, eternal life in God's kingdom will be perfect. Followers of Jesus can look forward to spending eternity in God's kingdom with him. And this is a kingdom that God has already prepared for whoever belongs to him.

And it is infinitely better than the broken world that we currently live in. But, not everyone will be there. And we see this repeated in many of Jesus' teachings in the rest of Matthew.

The Sermon on the Mount ends in chapter 7 with the separation of people who do God's will from those who don't do God's will. And again, in chapter 13, Jesus talks about separating people like separating weeds from wheat or separating good fish from bad fish.

[12 : 40] And then all the weeds and the bad fish gets thrown into a fiery furnace where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And so we shouldn't be surprised to see Jesus teaching once again here in chapter 25 that after separating the sheep from the goats, the goats will go away into eternal punishment, into the eternal fire.

And the common pattern that we see here for what Jesus will do in his judgment is that there will only be two groups. two groups, two destinations, not three groups, not one group, but two.

Now, depending on how we see ourselves, we find ourselves categorizing ourselves as either upper, middle, or lower class, or anywhere in between in terms of socioeconomic status.

And in the tragic sinking of the Titanic in 1912, there was a huge diversity of people on board. world. But it didn't really matter whether they were first, second, or third class passengers, because when it came to life and death, there was ultimately only two destinations for them.

It's either making it onto a lifeboat and be rescued, or death. And so it is with us. If we think that we have the right view of Jesus returning as king and judge, we also need to ask ourselves whether we have the right view that there are only two eternal destinations.

[14 : 07] Are we tempted to not preach this hard truth? We must preach it faithfully. Jesus did not pull his punches in revealing the reality of hell and of eternal punishment to us.

We cannot preach a watered-down version of the gospel where eternal punishment in hell does not exist. However hard this truth may be, we need to grasp the weight and the reality of this.

And removing the reality of hell and eternal punishment from the gospel may make it more palatable for our listeners. But where is the good news if there is no hell and eternal punishment to be rescued from?

And what about the urgency for us to warn others about God's judgment, especially when we know that Jesus could return at any moment like a thief in the night? So if we have the right view that Jesus, the king and judge, will return to judge us to only either eternal life or eternal punishment, what should our lives look like in the present?

And that brings us to the final point which is how does Jesus judge between sheep and goats? Do we have the right view of the basis for Jesus' judgment? Do we have the right view of the basis for Jesus' judgment?

[15 : 19] So who is a sheep and who is a goat in Jesus' eyes? Jesus said to the sheep, if we read from verse 35, 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.

And 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.

And then from verses 41 to 45, Jesus judged the people as goats because they did not do any of those things to him. Now whenever Jesus has some significant point to make, he uses the expression, truly I say to you.

And here in this passage, he uses that expression twice to answer the question of, Lord, when did we see you? And he says, truly I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

[16 : 35] And 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 now you may think that's absurd. If you were thirsty and gave you a drink, only your thirst is quenched, not somebody else's.

Yet Jesus is claiming that it is the same as giving him a drink. And we shouldn't be surprised. When Jesus sent out his 12 apostles in Matthew chapter 10 verses 40 and 42, he said, whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. So do you see it?

It's the same idea as that from today's passage. It isn't the first time that readers of Matthew's gospel would have heard of this idea that receiving Jesus' disciples is the same as receiving him, which in turn is the same as receiving God the Father who sent him.

And when Jesus says, whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, there's a clear echo of this in verse 35 where Jesus said, I was thirsty and you gave me drink.

[17 : 55] In the sense that giving a fellow disciple in need of a drink is the same as doing it for Jesus. Now having said that, let's dig deeper and to work out who Jesus is referring to as his brothers.

Let us look at another occasion in Matthew where Jesus talks about his brothers. Back in chapter 12, Jesus' mother and brothers were asking to speak to Jesus. But Jesus replied, who is my mother and who are my brothers?

And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, here are my mother and my brothers for whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

And on another occasion in chapter 28, verse 10, after Jesus' resurrection, he said to the women on the way to tell Jesus' disciples of his resurrection, do not be afraid.

Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me. Now Jesus refers to whoever does the will of my Father in heaven and to all his disciples as his brothers.

[19 : 04] So brothers doesn't mean everyone, but specifically followers of Jesus. And if Jesus' brothers refers specifically to Jesus' followers, then what does the least of these my brothers mean?

Now I think it's pretty interesting that when you consider the areas of need that Jesus calls out in these verses, food for hunger, drink for thirst, hospitality for a foreigner, clothing for someone who needs clothes, and visiting someone who may be sick or in prison, these are all basic needs that can be summed up as food, shelter, and companionship.

There must be a sense in which the least of these my brothers means specifically brothers and sisters in Christ who need help meeting these basic needs. And as Christians living in Dulwich surrounded by wealth, comfort, and temptations of being self-sufficient, we often don't worry, sorry, we often, we don't often worry about basic needs of food, shelter, and companionship.

And at the same time, God's body consists of fellow followers of Christ around the world who would need help meeting these basic needs. And we only need to look at the work of a charity like Open Doors to see that there are brothers and sisters in Christ across the world who need help living out their faith despite heavy costs.

For example, Open Doors has been supporting Christians in Manipur, India, caught in the ethnic conflicts since it started five months ago. More than 120 Christians have been killed, 4,500 buildings and homes belong to Christians, and 400 churches have been destroyed, and around 50,000 believers have been displaced.

[20 : 50] Supporting Open Doors is just one example of how we could practically help the least of Jesus' brothers. And I'm sure there are more ways in which we can live this out.

And so please don't hear me wrong, I'm not pushing for a gospel of social action here. On one hand, it's a beautiful thing that we are a loving church family who love and serve one another practically and sacrificially.

And I hear of people being involved on muerotas for families with a newborn child or people going out of their way to give a lift to someone who is unable to make it to church easily.

And it's great, and we should continue loving one another in the church family this way. But on the other hand, in the globalized world that we currently live in, have we considered loving fellow brothers and sisters in Christ beyond the comforts of the Dulwich area?

What might it look like to live out Jesus' challenging words here as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me? The kind of world that we live in at the moment though we may not be geographically in the same location as those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ, we actually have tangible means and channels to remotely support them through gifts and through prayer.

[22 : 12] Not only could we be helping the least of Jesus' brothers meet the basic needs of food, drink, and shelter, but supporting them in difficult times would also spur them on in their faith.

Now, at this point you may be wondering, what about the poor and the needy who are not Christians? Now, what this passage is saying is not, don't help unbelievers who are poor and needy.

This would contradict Jesus' words, for example, his parable of the Good Samaritan. But for the focus of today's passage, there is a more specific call to serve Jesus' brothers because it is the same as serving Jesus himself.

love. I think John Piper said something that is very helpful to consider. He said, we help suffering believers because they bear the name of Christ and because we see Christ in them.

And we help suffering unbelievers in the hope that they will come to bear the name of Christ and because we want to see Christ in them. So let's make sure that we love and serve other suffering believers because it is the same as helping Jesus.

[23 : 29] But let's get to the heart of what this is really about because ultimately our faith in Jesus Christ and our love for him are the basis for which he judges us. And this passage gives the impression that we are judged based on our works because in a sense we are.

And at the same time, we are saved by God's grace alone through Jesus paying the penalty of our sins for us. And we cannot in a million years work for our salvation.

And that is the clear message in the rest of Matthew in chapters 26-28 as Jesus heads to the cross for us. However, our works do indicate whether our faith in Christ and love for him are genuine or not.

So hear these words from James chapter 2 verses 15-17. If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead. Actions speak louder than words. And I can say the words I love you to my wife.

[24 : 44] But if I don't look after her when she falls ill or if I don't do my share of my house chores, do I really love her? In the same way, if I profess my faith in Jesus as my Lord and Savior and say that I love him, yet I do not love any of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is my faith and love for him really genuine?

So as we come to a close, let's make sure that we have the right view of Jesus' return as king and judge to judge us to either eternal life or punishment based on whether we have loved him by loving our fellow brothers and sisters.

Having the right view will determine how we live in light of these challenging words from Jesus. Let's pray to close. Father God, thank you for Jesus' sobering and challenging words to us.

And as we look forward to Jesus' return, please help us by your Holy Spirit to love you and your people. Amen. Amen. Amen.