

# The king who judges

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Preacher: Adam Penwright

[ 0 : 00 ] He will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those of his right, come, you who are blessed by my father. Take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in, and he did clothes, and you clothed me. I was ill, and you looked after me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me.

Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and buy you in, or on need of clothes and clothed you? When did we see you ill, or in prison and go to visit you?

The king will reply, truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Then he will say to those of his left, depart from me, you who are the first, and will see eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

[ 1 : 17 ] For I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes, and you did not clothe me. I was ill, and in prison, and you did not look after me.

They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothes, or ill, or in prison, and did not help you? You will reply, truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, for the righteous to eternal life. Thanks, Emma. We heard already from Chris this morning, Advent is a time for waiting.

For most of us, particularly for most of the children, I suspect Advent is mainly a time for waiting for Christmas presents and Christmas. But in the church's calendar, Advent is a time for waiting for Jesus.

At Advent, we think back to those who waited for Jesus the first time before the first Christmas. And then now, we wait for Jesus to come again.

[ 2 : 30 ] Jesus has promised that he will return. And so the question for us today is, how can we make sure that we're ready? Advent reminds us that Jesus will return, and that we need to be ready.

We're in Matthew's Gospel today, and in the section that we've been looking at, or just before that, Jesus has been teaching his disciples that one day he will return.

He's used vivid images to describe what that will be like. Jesus describes his return will be like a boss coming back from a trip to inspect the work that they left behind to get done.

Or Jesus describes his return like a wedding day that's coming soon, and everything needs to be ready for it. Or Jesus describes his return like it will be the end of the world, because there will be nothing as dramatic or decisive or final as that.

Jesus will return, and we need to be ready. And yet here's the uncomfortable truth from our passage, as I'm sure you picked up. Not everyone will be ready.

[ 3 : 43 ] When Jesus returns, our passage says he will look at each one of us. Some will receive his approval, and others will face his anger. And so it's crucial that we listen carefully to what Jesus says about his return and how to get ready.

Advent reminds us that Jesus is coming back. How can we be ready? The first thing is, Jesus says from this passage, there will be one judge.

Firstly, when Jesus returns, there will be one judge. Does anybody at Christmastime look forward to getting some quality streets? The thing about a box of quality streets, or a tin if you're more lucky than me, is it's all kind of a mixture in there, right?

And you know, you know in your mind at least, that some of them you like, and some of them you don't like so much. I don't know about you, I quite like the orange crunch, wherever that is, but a toffee penny, I think that's a bit naff to be honest.

But each of us in our mind will think, I know some of the ones I like, I know some of the ones I don't like. Each of us will be a judge of the mixture that's there.

[ 5 : 03 ] In front of Jesus, there's a mixture of people, but it's a matter far more serious. And when Jesus returns, he will judge, and will say, look at some people and think, I like that.

And look at others and think, I don't like that so much. See how Jesus describes it in this passage, in verse 31. This is what he says, When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

The Son of Man is Jesus' title for himself. He descends from the heavens with the power and glory and authority of God himself. But as a man, Jesus will judge everyone, every person from every nation, not just Christians, or religious people, or just people from England, or just people from Israel.

No one gets out of this. All the nations will be brought before Jesus, and there will be one judge, who all people have to come before. I would guess, particularly at Christmas time, when we think of Jesus, we would much, much rather think of little baby Jesus, born in a manger.

Or the kind of Jesus, who holds a lamb tenderly in his arms, and welcomes children to him. And don't get me wrong, Jesus, when he comes, the first time is meek and mild, and Jesus always is gracious and kind, and welcomes people to him that say they need him.

[ 6 : 54 ] But when Jesus returns, he won't come like a baby in a manger, or like a meek and mild carpenter. Instead, he will come with all the glory of a heavenly and majestic ruler, because that's what he is, the Son of Man, with angels, and with the greatest throne ever.

He will return to judge, and he is the one judge that really matters. He will judge everyone fairly and carefully, and his opinion of you matters far more than anyone else's.

Jesus warns us that he will return to judge the world. And because he's pre-warned us, we must get ready for it. So there is one judge, and he will make two judgments.

Let's go back to our box of quality streets. And when you get a box, you could effectively make two piles. You have the ones that you do really like, and you have the ones that you don't like so much. Even if just in your mind, you know to which of the two piles each of the chocolates belong. And it's always a bit sad at the end of Christmas when it's just one chocolate left behind that nobody really wants to take.

[ 8 : 18 ] And here, Jesus says very, very clearly throughout the whole passage, there is one judge, and he will make two judgments. He will put the sheep on his right, and he will put the goats on his left.

Those on the right receive his approval, and those on the left face his anger. There is no in-between or middle ground. It's really hard to hear. But on the final day, there is no in-between where you think, well, I was friends with Christians, or I went to church occasionally, or I gave some money to charity.

The decisive question is whether Jesus will say, you're on my right, or you're on my left. I suspect this idea of Jesus making two judgments so decisively makes us uncomfortable.

We might not like it that there is no middle ground, really. We would much prefer it if Jesus just said, everyone is nice enough and can just get on with each other and be friends.

But that is not the reality of Jesus' final judgment. And he doesn't shy away from it. He makes it clear. There will be one judge, him, and he will make two judgments. Sheep on his right, and goats on his left.

[ 9 : 35 ] Some get his approval, others his anger. It's a hard passage. I tell you what's been helpful for me understanding it these last couple of weeks.

And that is the context of where it comes in Matthew. In Matthew chapter 24 and 25, Jesus is giving some of his last teaching to his disciples.

You could just see, probably on the last verse of this page, the first verse of chapter 26, the kind of things that's coming next. Jesus is pretty imminently going to be crucified.

And then as we know, he will later rise again from the dead. This is some of Jesus' last teaching to his disciples before he ascends to heaven and they are left physically without him.

Jesus is going to send his disciples out with a message that Jesus rules the kingdom of God. Jesus sends the people out with a message that they need to recognize Jesus as king, that all people have sinned, but that forgiveness can only be found through Jesus.

[10:44] That's the message that these 12 disciples are going to be sent out to go and share with the world. And you can imagine, if you're about to be left without Jesus physically, sent out to share that message, you're pretty nervous.

You feel pretty vulnerable. Jesus, your teacher, your friend, is not with you physically. And the disciples would know they're going to get two reactions from people.

Some will welcome them and receive their message with open arms. Others will reject them and reject the message of Jesus' kingdom and therefore reject Jesus.

And that's the two camps. Some will welcome them and Jesus' message and Jesus. Others will reject them and Jesus' message and Jesus.

Actually, earlier on in the Gospel, Jesus kind of sent his disciples out on a bit of a trial mission. You might like to think it like this.

[11:41] And he gave them very similar teaching to this actually. He said, anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. That's what Jesus said to his disciples when he sent them out on their trial mission.

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. If anyone welcomes one of Jesus' disciples, with Jesus' message, they are welcoming Jesus. But therefore, if anyone rejects one of Jesus' disciples with Jesus' message, they are rejecting Jesus.

This is how Jesus makes the decisive judgments. The sheep on his right, the goats on his left.

Jesus is sending out his disciples and he knows that sometimes they will be treated well by people and Jesus will love that and honour that.

But sometimes the disciples Jesus sends out will be treated very poorly by people and Jesus will be angry about that. There's this clear distinction.

Do you welcome Jesus and his disciples or do you reject them? Do you see in our verse, in our passage, verse 40, Jesus specifies that this is all about how the disciples are being treated.

[12:58] Let me read verse 40. The king will reply, truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

And to the disciples who are about to go out with Jesus without him physically with them, this would be very reassuring for them that Jesus is so invested in them, cares for them so closely and intimately that how they are treated Jesus takes very personally.

And to the disciples going out on mission, the reminder is Jesus is with you and he cares about you so much that actually how he judges people on the final day will depend on how people treated you. And perhaps the obvious question as we study this passage though is, well who is Jesus really talking about when he says his brothers and sisters? Because that would change how we understand this passage quite a lot.

The best thing that we can do is see what Jesus says himself about who are his brothers or sisters in Matthew's Gospel. Earlier on in chapter 12 Jesus says this, there's a time where Jesus is teaching a crowd and his actual family want to speak with him and Jesus replies with these important words words.

[14:17] Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Pointing to 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.

Jesus says that his brothers and sisters are his disciples, those who do God's will. And so back in Matthew chapter 25 Jesus tells us that when he returns there will be one judge and two judgments. some people get his approval others his anger and the judgment depends on how people treated Jesus' brothers and sisters because how someone treats Jesus' brothers and sisters reveals how they would treat Jesus himself.

Jesus will return and there will be one judge two judgments. difference. But what's the difference between the key groups? There is one key distinction between their lives now.

We've seen that already. How do you treat Jesus' brother or sisters? I want you to imagine one of your best friends calls you up. Perhaps a friend you've known for years from university or

something like that.

[15:32] And they say my sister or my brother is coming for a job interview in Cambridge in a couple of weeks. Could they stay the night at your place? And you think well I have the space and I could and it will be totally appropriate for them to stay with me.

If you care about your best friend you will welcome their sister or brother to stay with you. You will make sure that they are well treated for the sake of your best friend.

But if you say I'm not interested in letting them stay I will lock the door and leave them outside in the cold. It would show that you really do not care for your best friend at all.

How you treat their sister or brother shows how you care about your friend. In the same way Jesus says how you treat his brothers or sisters reflects how you treat him.

He identifies with his brothers and sisters so closely that he takes how you treat them very personally. And this is a key thing to understand in this passage.

[16:37] The source of how you're saved the source is how you treat Jesus. Do you come and bow the knee to him and ask him for forgiveness? But the sign is how you treat Jesus' brothers and sisters.

The source is how you treat Jesus. The sign is how you treat Jesus' brothers and sisters. And read with me from verse 34 as we see Jesus' judgment and how he articulates some of this.

Verse 34 Then the king will say to those on his right Come you are blessed by my father take your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world for I was hungry and you gave me something to eat I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink I was a stranger and you invited me in I needed clothes and you clothed me I was ill and you looked after me I was in prison and you came to visit me Jesus gives this list of six very practical things to feed those who are hungry to give drink to those who are thirsty to welcome those who are strangers to clothe those who are naked to care for those who are ill and to visit those who are in prison There are six very very practical things and those practical things done well are mirrored later on in the passage by those who don't do those things

It's the key distinction How have you treated Jesus' brothers and sisters? Have you done these kind of things? One of the applications from our passage today to Christians is that you must love and care for your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus takes how his brothers and sisters are cared for very personally Why?

Because as we've seen before how you treat other Christian believers the sign reveals the source how you treat Jesus The importance of loving brothers and sisters is clear throughout the Bible We've been studying Genesis lately as you would know 1 John draws the connection between Cain and Abel and Genesis and this teacher this teaching loving your brothers and sisters See this 1 John says For this is the message you heard from the beginning We should love one another Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him Jesus takes it very personally how we care for our brothers and sisters It's worth saying I'm very grateful Emma and I are for when we moved to St John's I think receiving some of this very personal care from when people helped us move house or lent us their car or welcomed us over for lunch with their children or lent us a plunger

[19:45] We're very grateful for the practical care that our brothers and sisters showed to us and I'm grateful that at St John's I think most of the time we do this really really well but Jesus says it's very serious we must love our brothers and sisters around us because it's a reflection of how we treat him It's worth saying as well the fact that I think this passage is primarily speaking about how we treat our brothers and sisters that is other Christian disciples doesn't negate the rest of the Bible's teaching that is very clear that we must care for the poor as Christians generally from Proverbs to Hebrews to Jesus teaching it's very clear that it is a godly and generous thing to love all people and care for all of the poor not just Christians but I think this passage specifically talks about how Jesus identifies with his brothers or sisters that is his disciples to have a hatred or uncaring attitude to one of Jesus' brothers or sisters is a sign that the state of your heart may be in serious danger

I want to say as well if you're not a Christian and just visiting today you might think about this too as Jesus' disciples go out with the message of the gospel Jesus takes very seriously whether his disciples are welcomed well or treated harshly that means if you're not a Christian today the question is have you welcomed and received the message of Jesus' kingdom which his brothers

