



Sheep and Goats

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 25:31-46

July 21, 2013

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Today we finish the last sermon preached by the Lord Jesus Christ before fulfilling the Father's will and giving Himself to be crucified for the sins of man, giving His life and shedding His blood to ransom people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, making propitiation for the sins of His people. Out of immeasurable love He would give Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God, to redeem His church from the curse of the Law and from the wrath of God, giving His own life to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

But today, we see the teacher teaching His final lesson. The point of the lesson, the climax of the message, is exceedingly clear. There is a final judgment coming, a judgment that will define forever the fate of every human soul, a fate that will be eternally determined and sealed according to our personal response to the Lord Jesus Christ. Though it is seldom considered and never spoken of in polite company, there is a judgment coming and it is centered exclusively upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, not everything is what it seems and that is especially true of Christ. If you had been alive in the days of Jesus, though He made quite a stir in Israel, His influence, you would have concluded that the fame of His name was not widespread. No one, outside of His apostles and disciples took much stock of their lives in light of Him. And it is really no different in our own age. The Lord Jesus Christ is marginalized in our society. Not much thought is given to His Lordship except by a minority who are increasingly seen as zealots, intolerant, bigots, extremists, uneducated and unenlightened rubes, gullible fools who believe in fairy tales. No one much believes in the reality of judgment anymore. It is outdated thinking, something contrived to "keep people down, to suppress people, to destroy human liberty, to rob people of their civil rights." There is no Day of Judgment, many believe, because there is no God, at least not the God of the Bible. There is no life beyond the grave, or if there is it is just some eternal

consciousness, some collective mind, not a personal, conscious life. This life is all there is. This is a fast growing sentiment in our society.

Even among the religious of our society, the idea of God's judgment is passé. There will be no real judgment, no heaven or hell because everyone is going to heaven. All roads lead to God...blah, blah, blah. God is all love – love how they define love – tolerant, truthless, sentimental and insipid. Still others comfort themselves with the thought if there is a judgment, God is so loving that He could not possibly consign someone to eternal judgment – that would be unloving and unjust, they say – so those who are not Christians will simply cease to exist. That is called annihilationism. Those who do not believe do not go to hell, they just cease to exist. Others, when pressed, will concede that there may be a hell but that it is reserved for the worst of the worst – Hitler, terrorists, mass murderers, child molesters, etc. Everyone else gets to go to heaven. But beloved, this kind of thinking comes out of a baseless view of Christ as someone who is just oozing this undefined love and dripping sentimentality and whose only role is to heap up gifts and delights upon all men, giving them their hearts desires, enabling them to get everything that they want in life, a fairy-godmother kind of God who has no real authority to command and to judge, nor does He want to.

But it is utter foolishness. It shows a thorough ignorance of Jesus Christ and of His cross. If there were no judgment to come, no account to give before the holy God for the deeds done in this body, there would have been no need for Christ's cross to reconcile sinful men to the holy God. Christ's righteous life and death on the cross confirms the reality of eternal judgment. It stands forever as a testimony of the exacting holiness of God, His hatred and judgment of sin, and the demand that eternal justice be satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ, if man could ever be acceptable to God. Jesus Christ is the Great and Only Savior of sinful men, He really does satisfy the demands of God's holiness for every sinner who will repent and believe in Him as their substitute when they stand before the judgment of God. Christ is the true Savior from the judgment of sin, the true Redeemer and Lord. But make no mistake, He is also the judge of everyone who has ever lived – everyone.

While in the last couple of parables, Jesus has focused exclusively upon the professing church, in these last words, the scope widens to include the whole of humanity and Jesus tells His disciples about the coming judgment, about:

The Return of the King (v. 31-33) Look at it starting in verse 31: ““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.” (Matthew 25:31–33, ESV)

Oh, how our Lord loved to describe Himself as the Son of Man. It emphasized His humility, His servanthood, His identification with us, His role as mediator, His coming as Savior, but that is not what He is emphasizing when He uses that term in this passage. The same Jesus who in humility suffered humiliation, who was condemned by lawless men, who gave Himself willingly to mocking and scourging, to the ultimate degradation of the cross in order to secure the salvation of His people – that same Jesus will come again in glory, and be revealed to all mankind as the Son of Man described by Daniel in Daniel 7:13-14, where the prophet writes: ““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.” (Daniel 7:13–14, ESV)

Don't be deceived by His humble appearance in the gospels, by His glory cloaked in humility, by His majesty veiled in human flesh. That same Jesus will come again in glory, in might, in power, in majesty, in unimaginable splendor to judge the world. To Him, the Father has committed all judgment. The brilliance of His divine radiance, the majesty of His excellence and perfections will be readily visible to every human being. It will be seen and felt. He will bring with Him all of the angels of heaven – every angel, tested and proven faithful to Christ to do His will, the glorious servants of the King who did not fall with Satan and so were proven righteous, the most powerful created beings in the universe – it will be a spectacle, a sight that will produce wonder and awe in the hearts of Christ's people and strike terror and fear in the hearts of those who have rejected, hated, and ignored Him.

And He will sit upon His glorious throne, a throne of authority and justice that every human being will acknowledge. Do you see? Jesus is making clear that to Him every knee will bow – willingly or unwillingly, and every tongue will confess Him as King over all – willingly or unwillingly. Oh it may not appear that way now. And in the very near future it would seem very unlikely, but He will have the last word. His words will stand. He will be the one who makes the

final judgments that will stand for all eternity. There will be no court of appeals, no negotiation, no plea-bargaining. Jesus Christ will judge the world in perfect justice. All will acknowledge this throne and the One who sits upon it at perfect in judgment, righteous in His declarations and decrees, and non-negotiable in His divine sentence – everyone.

Jesus will have gathered before Him all of the nations of the world, no-one will be overlooked, everyone will obey the summons of this glorious King and come forward to receive their eternal sentence. All who gladly came before the King Jesus Christ to worship and serve Him on the earth during their lives and all those who refused to willingly honor Him, who labored against Him, who mocked him or gave no thought to Him, will find that they must come before His throne.

And in that moment, everything that makes for distinctions among men in this world – power, wealth, intelligence, privilege, position, influence, accomplishment, athletic ability, business acumen, race, preferential treatment – all of those things will disappear as Jesus makes the public declaration of the only distinction, the eternal distinction, that matters -- sheep and goats, saved and unsaved, blessed and cursed, righteous and unrighteous, redeemed and lost. With the perfect precision of a shepherd who rightly distinguishes the sheep from the goats, Jesus will separate all of humanity into two distinct, unchanging and irreconcilable groups --- those for whom He died, all the redeemed of every age, and those who have rebelled against His glory and who have rejected Him. The sheep He will put on His right hand to receive blessing and honor and the goats he will put to His left to receive eternal curse and divine wrath.

There will be found only two groups on that day – only two. The first, the sheep, the blood-bought, the Spirit-sealed, the faithful, the true disciples of Christ, for whom Christ is their sole hope in life and in death. The second, the goats, made up of those who pretended to be Christians but whose masquerade will end before the One who sees the heart of every man, and those who are haters of Christ, mockers of Christianity, scornors of gospel, who persecuted the faithful and so persecuted Christ and all who ignored Christ and lived as if God were an imaginary being.

What a day! For the faithful disciple it will be day of rejoicing and worship, of joy unspeakable as they stand before the Judge who is their Savior and Lord, their Shepherd, their High Priest, their Advocate, their elder Brother, the lover of their souls. But for the unbeliever, for the false professor and the outright rejecter of Christ, it will be a day of fear and sorrow, of horror like they could not have ever imagined. Before the assembled world, they will be exposed. The false Christian who wanted the reputation of loving Christ, but who did not, will find their reputation is worthless and empty as they stand, not before their Savior but their Judge. The one who mocked Christ and had much to say about the foolishness of the Bible, the foolishness of Christ, will have their mouths stopped. Those who persecuted the church, those who had no use for Christ, those who refused to be convinced will on that Day be thoroughly convinced as they stand before the Divine Judge and Lord. And they will be gripped with the fear and the everlasting realization that they were the fools, not those who loved and lived for Christ, and it will be too late. The Christ, whose gospel they despised, whose gracious invitation they refused to hear will now be their exacting and thorough Judge. They will know that His every word about them is right, His every accusation of their sinfulness true, His every judgment perfect and without flaw. Christ will come as Judge of the sheep and of the goats and first we see:

The Judgment of the Sheep (v. 34-40) Read with me, starting in verse 34: “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.’” (Matthew 25:34–40, ESV)

Jesus says so much in this passage, so much that we need to see. He clearly upholds the truth that salvation is not by works but according to the grace of God, but He also clearly says that certain evidences will also manifest the grace that brings salvation, and will be the evidence by which Christ will judge on the last day. Let me show you what I mean. Just look at that first thing He says. “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. Come you who are blessed by my Father. What does that mean? That world blessed is the very heart of the electing grace of God. Paul wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:3–14, ESV) By His sheer grace, God has blessed His sheep – by grace He chose them, by grace He sent His Son to save them, by grace He brought them out of death into life, by grace He makes them holy and blameless, by grace He caused them to hear the word of truth, to believe unto salvation, by grace He sealed them with the Holy Spirit until they inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This is all of grace. Salvation is by grace.

But the judgment that He renders on that last day will be based on the evidence of --the evidence of -- their salvation, the evidence that they are the blessed of God, chosen in Him for part in the Kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world – the evidence in our lives that we are His. Look at what Jesus says: “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.” Jesus says the incontestable evidence that they have been chosen by God, born again, saved by grace through faith, that they have trusted in Christ for salvation and the Holy Spirit has sealed them for this day is that they have loved and served Jesus by loving and serving His people, His disciples, His church. To love and serve the people of Christ, the bride of Christ, is to love and serve Christ. That is the evidence by which Christ makes His judgment, the evidence that He commends.

Beloved, do not miss this. The great judgment will be made, not upon claims and confessions, not upon feelings and inclinations, not upon well-rehearsed testimonies, not upon rhetoric and words but upon evidence. The judgment that Christ renders will be based upon demonstrable, verifiable evidence. The works that Christians perform do not save them, but those works are evidence that we are Christians, that we love Christ. And what Jesus is saying to us is this. The evidence of a true and credible Christian confession is not how many great and glorious things have been done in the name of Christ, not great things as people think of them at all, but the little things – sharing food, giving a cup of cold water, welcoming a brother or sister, caring for the needy brother or sister, visiting the sick, caring for the persecuted or if we could expand this idea – encouraging the downcast, bearing with the weak, correcting the straying and erring, exhorting and edifying, praying for someone in secret, investing your life without expectation of return, -- all of these acts of mercy, kindness, love, service to the people of Christ – that's the focus. Not that we are not called to love our neighbor, to love the lost and care for them and share the gospel with them – we are, but that's not the point, not the focus. Jesus is focusing on loving the brethren, because, as He tells us, love for Christ's people is love given to Him. Jesus is saying that the way that you relate to other Christians is the proof of your love for Him. It is an expression of our relationship to Christ. These things, done in the right spirit, flow from a heart that loves Christ. Those who lack these expressions of love to the people of God lack the evidence of new life in Christ.

And the truth, as Charles Spurgeon said, is this: The actions which will be mentioned at the Judgment Day, as the proof of our being the blessed of the Lord, spring from the Grace of God, for He says, "You blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world." They fed the hungry, but Sovereign Grace had first fed them. They clothed the naked, but Infinite Love first clothed them. They went to the prison, but Free Grace had first set them free from a worse prison. They visited the sick, but the Good Physician, in His Infinite Mercy, first came and visited them!

Can I show you something else? Do you see that the sheep are surprised by Christ's judgment being based upon their acts of love and service to Him as they loved and served the brethren in His name? It is a window into the heart of the one that is truly a sheep of God's fold. They did not do those things to earn reward, as theological bean counters trying to earn merit with God, or do all of these things with ulterior motive to earn favor with others or God, and the proof of that is that when the came to the judgment, they did not have a list of all the stuff they had

done. They didn't pull out a sheet of paper upon which they had written down all the stuff that Jesus might have missed when He rendered His judgment. No. They did what they did, not to curry favor with God or with other people, but because they couldn't help it. Their new nature, their love for Christ, compelled them to do it. It was their delight and joy to love Christ by loving His people. It was so a part of their character, so a part of who they are in Christ that they did not think of it as something special and that is why they forgot it.

Do you see beloved? Any confession of Christ as Savior is empty of reality if it is not confirmed by a life of faith and love. Let me say it again. Any confession of Christ as Savior is empty of reality if it is not confirmed by a life of faith and love. This standard that Jesus uses is completely consistent in the Scriptures. Later, when the Apostle John wrote the book of 1 John, he presented the exact same standard of measure regarding the reality of our faith.

Repeatedly, in his epistle, He gives us three tests: Do you confess that Jesus is God come in human flesh? Do you obey Christ's commands as the pattern of your life? Do you love other Christians? Do you see? The sheep that Jesus speaks of are not people who sat around strategizing and contriving ways to prove that they were Christ-followers, trying to earn God's acceptance. They are simply true believers, who naturally love and serve Christ's people, and therefore love Christ, because of Christ's love for them, because although they may be similar or very different from one another, they have been bought by the blood of Christ and they love those bought by the blood of Christ and so they naturally do what pleases the Lord and meets with His eternal commendation. That is the evidence that proves the reality of salvation. But what of those on the left? Jesus tells us as He pronounces the:

The Judgment of the Goats (v. 41-45) Listen to these words again: ""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.'" (Matthew 25:41-45, ESV) What terrifying words these are: Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Depart from me. What horrific words. Depart from Me. I want to tell you that the worst part about hell is not the fire, not the weeping and gnashing of teeth, not the suffering and torment, not the gnawing darkness, but that reality that makes those things necessary – and that reality is this: the

absence of Christ to bless. “Depart from Me,” Jesus says and receive what He alone can save you from. Depart from Me.

This does not mean that Christ will be completely absent from hell. He is omnipresent. To be separated from Christ and cast into hell does not mean that a person will finally be free of Christ. That person will remain forever and inescapably accountable to Him. Christ will remain Lord over the person’s wretched existence. But in hell, a person will be forever separated from God in His love, grace, joy, peace, kindness, goodness and gentleness. He will be consigned to have Him only in His holy wrath and that...forever. They will be cast into the hell of fire prepared for the devil and his angels – prepared for the enemy of our souls, the accuser of the brethren, the one who above all hates God and everything that is good and right and pure. And they will be cast there, because it is the only place suitable for them. It is what they deserve in their rebellion and the evidence for that is, likewise, just as clear.

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.’ Does that strike you as it does me? The reason they will be cast into eternal hell is because they did not love and did not serve Christ’s brothers and sisters, they lacked the very real evidence, the essential evidence, of love for Christ’s people and so proved they never loved Him. They did not love the church. Either they were indifferent, or ignored God’s Word or they were active dividers and destroyers – gossips, grudge bearers, malicious, uncaring, deceivers, envious, angry, immoral, leading the people of God into sin. The goats never thought that this was so important, loving and serving the people of God, loving Christ by loving His people, but such is the real evidence of true salvation. Jesus could not make it plainer. It is because they have not loved the people of God and that lack of love is the outward evidence, the standing evidence, of their hatred of Christ. They have rejected the gospel, rejected the King of kings, refused to honor and love Him as Savior and Lord and so they will spend eternity in the same place of wrath that was prepared for the devil, who is truly their father. The sheep and the goats will be judged according to the evidence of their love for Christ’s people, and therefore their love for Christ and the judgment Jesus makes is

A Judgment Without End (v. 46) Jesus speaks the final words of His sermon saying: “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”” (Matthew 25:46, ESV) The righteous receive eternal life. How can we even conceive of heaven? Our best attempts, our most valiant efforts to understand the glory, the bliss, the wonder of being with our Savior and Lord, resting in His presence, delighting in the light of His glory and joy, no tears, no fears, no sickness, no wants, no sin, perfect communion with all the saints – our best attempts to fully comprehend this are child’s play at best. There is greatness and glory that surpasses even sanctified comprehension. Paul is right to say: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV) The sight of Jesus, face to face. Words fail.

And likewise, the torment of hell – we have already talked about --the eternal pain of the body--the eternal pain of an accusing conscience--the eternal suffering with wicked, the devil and his angels--the eternal remembrance of truth rejected, opportunities rejected, of the offer of the gospel spurned—no hope for eternity. It is horrific. But even hell, is beyond our ability to fully grasp. How can we? But be certain of this, hell is real and it is eternal. It must be or words have no meaning at all. It must be or the very foundations of heaven are undone If hell is not real or has an end, heaven is not real or must have an end too. They both stand or fall together. It must be real and eternal, or every doctrine of the gospel is undermined. If a man may escape hell without faith in Christ, or sanctification of the Spirit, then sin is no longer an infinite evil against an infinitely holy God, and there was no great need of Christ’s making atonement for our sins. The death and the resurrection of Christ would not matter. But it does. More than anything else – it does.

And so I ask you, in light of this certain judgment -- Do you have the evidence of real saving faith in Christ demonstrated by an active love for the people of God? If you do not, Jesus says that is a revealer of the condition of your soul. Flee to Christ and find your refuge in Him. I implore you now, by the mercies of God, be reconciled to God by trusting in Christ who has made a way. Come to Christ now. Eternity is before you. Behold God’s infinite and rescuing love revealed in the sacrifice of his dear Son, and know that God is gracious, merciful, and willing to save sinners. Behold Christ’s finished atonement, and know that God in Christ has made the way to deliver sinners, even you, if you will repent and believe. All of your sins forgiven, your life made new, your very nature transformed. Lay aside your sin, admit your need, confess your brokenness and know that God can be and is both just and the Justifier of sinners who believe on his Son. Behold his amazing, almighty, saving grace, and know that our God is a God who is able to save and then lay hold of Him by faith. “For our sake he made him

to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV) Be found in Him, not having an appearance of godliness, not having merely a confession, but having the evidence of real saving faith in the only One who can save.

And beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, may we live lives ready for the return of the King. The way we do it is by simply trusting Him for salvation, loving Him, serving our brothers and sisters in Christ in His name, making His gospel known. We follow Him and live as He lived, not to earn His favor, but from a heart of delight and love for Him. And when we fail, when we blow it, when our actions do not match our words, we remember the gospel – Christ died for our sins, all of them – and we repent and continue to follow Him. Grace will cover our sins and empower our faithfulness until we see our Savior face to face. Let’s pray.

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