

Sermon (8/5/2012): Matthew 25:31-46

- 5 discourses
- First one = Sermon on the Mount : 5- 7 / Last one = Olivet discourse: 24 & 25
- & so – final discourse recorded in Matt’s gospel ends with this teaching final judgment
- **Read & Pray**

I want to make 4 general observations and add a few words of application as we go.

First off...you can know for sure...there will come a day when Jesus will come back a second time

AND Judgment day is coming with Him

Someday He will vindicate and fully redeem His people and he will judge the world.

It maybe someday very soon one thing is for sure: salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

It will be a glorious return:

- v31: “*the Son of Man comes in his glory*” and ...”*he will sit on his glorious throne.*”
- M.24:27 “*For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*” And v.30 says “*all the tribes of the earth.... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*”

All the earth shall witness his return and it will be as clear as day.

In his letter to Titus, Paul refers to the return of Jesus as “*....our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

I trust we are NOT among those who look for *our best life now....*(KJV) if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. So – by way of application – let us always remember that we have a sure & blessed hope. A glorious day is coming soon....so take comfort in that & persevere.

Secondly, the final judgment involves a separation of all mankind

Jesus has just finished two parables....the 10 virgins and the talents...

.....and now as he ends his final discourse He gives a clear teaching of a future event

“**WHEN**...the Son of Man comes...” this IS NOT a parable....:

Jesus does use a metaphor of course: He separates men “*...as a shepherd separates sheep from goats*”.

It refers of course to the righteous & the wicked

- And Jesus has previously parable to teach a similar thing. In ‘wheat & weeds parable’ of Ma 13 the Master tells the reapers not to separate the wheat and weeds until harvest time....then they are to gather the weeds into bundles to be burnt and the wheat is to be brought into His barn. You see the similarity.

Considering a final disclosure & final separation makes us all pause and seriously reflect on **who we are**:

- Are we – am I - among the sheep – are we **believers** in Jesus? Have I been **born again**? Has my **heart** been changed? Am I **growing in my obedience**? Is my **love for Christ being shown** in an **increasing love for the brethren**? Without being presumptuous – am I **confident** of what he has done on MY behalf...is that truly my only hope? **Is His return my blessed hope?**

These are questions we need to ask ourselves... in 30 min. or so when we take the Lord’s Supper

- Or on the other hand...am I among the goats? Am I **self-deceived**? It's interesting that the end of Matthew's first discourse (Sermon on Mount) also pretty much ends with a teaching of Judgment Day..."*On that day **many** will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And **Jesus will speak some of the most chilling words** recorded in scripture: "Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness....I never knew you."*

On judgment day all mankind will be **separated** into these **two** groups: sheep & goats.

HOWEVER - before that day comes – while we still walk in this world – there is a **third group**: lost sheep. There's no such thing as a goat becoming a sheep; but there are lost sheep who are yet to be found.

There are still **those who are counted among God's elect**, men and women for whom Jesus Christ died, who are still living in darkness.

YOU & I still have brothers and sisters out there (and maybe in here) who are still in bondage.

I hope that motivates us to share the gospel with whomever we can, and to pray for those who have not come to faith...It **may be** a future brother or a sister... **because** *there's no way for you or me to distinguish the goats from the lost sheep.* ...even that profane neighbor or that co-worker.

Thirdly, in reference to how mankind will be judged....**(Rice)**

Three weeks ago, Ben preached on a passage from Rom 2:6-11:

"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. "

Ben emphasized the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone which results in good works.

There's no question about that ...by grace, through faith, unto good works.

We also know also that every sin is punished....

- The sins of the goats will be punished eternally in hell.
- The sins of the sheep were punished on Calvary.

Jesus took the punishment that belonged to His people when he died on our behalf.

It is only faith in what Jesus has done that declares us NOT GUILTY.

A salvation by faith and a judgment by works is the universal proclamation of the Bible.

The Bible knows of no salvation separate from obedience and good works; they are woven together.

*"Whoever **believes** in the Son has eternal life; whoever **does not obey** the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."* (John 3:36)

You may say, *"I still sin; I don't always obey."* And I say, *"Me too."* And I'll tell you something else: my **faith isn't perfect** yet either. *We're on a journey brothers & sister. Keep putting one foot in front of the other.*

Our Lord list 6 things here in Matt 25.... this list isn't exhaustiveIt doesn't seem like there is anything particularly significant about these 6 things....

Just **6 examples....modest** acts of mercy..... **BUT** please notice two things:

1. These are not over-the-top or world-stopping acts of charity. These are **simple acts of kindness** that are done without fanfare. Jesus said, "*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 – **Please allow His good words be an encouragement** to you.
Do not grow weary in well-doing. You gain **the commendation of God** for these things.
The **little things you do count....they matter....your Father sees them**.
2. We often think of the wicked being sent to hell for all the sinful things they do. Notice here that their condemnation is not based on the bad things they do...
..... in this passage, their judgment is based on the good things they don't do.

I know we don't get a full understanding of everything the Bible has to say from one passage....

But we may wonder why judgment is founded on what we call sins of omission rather than sins of commission....? I believe the answer lies in the fact that God is impartial.

What I mean is that there remain no more sins that the righteous sheep can be judged on....their sins have already been judged and condemned on Golgotha. (Col 2:14-15) Paul says God canceled "*.. the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*"

Our sins have **already** been judged, condemned & punished. **THAT is gospel....THAT is good news**.
God – in His impartiality "judges" on what remains: the good deeds that have been done **in God**.

Jesus said: (John 5:24) "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*"

On the other hand - the sins of the goats have not yet been judged...

.... and there is no propitiation against God's wrath left for them

When I think of the judgment of the goats of Matt 25 who are declared not to have done good deeds, and compare them with the condemned of Matt 7 whose "*mighty works done in His name*" are dismissed and declared to be workers of lawlessness....

It's curious, but one thing at least becomes very obvious to me:

It can be nothing inherent in the deeds themselves that merit commendation.

John says, "*But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.*" **Can I say it again...? By grace, through faith, unto good works.**

Finally....What I find **most** intriguing about this passage is our Lord's explanation to both the sheep & the goats...they both ask the same question: "**WHEN** did we see you hungry or sick and so on."

Yes...the sheep likely asked out a humble surprise....and the goats probably asked as a defensive reflex...

But it is the same question, and our Lord gives essentially the same answer:

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

...or to the goats "...you did not do it for me."

My first question...and I'm a little embarrassed to ask it...is... does that mean that acts of mercy done for those who ARE NOT His brothers are of "no account"?

It **sounds like a question some lawyer may ask**, right? (...with apologies to any lawyers here)...

You know....it sounds like I'm looking for a loophole.

Well – as it turns out – a lawyer did ask Jesus a very similar question.

When speaking of the two greatest commandments, a lawyer "... *desiring to justify himself*, (as Luke tells us) *said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Jesus goes on to tell the parable of "The Good Samaritan". You know the story. *Priest, Levite, Samaritan*

And at the end Jesus asks a very simple question: "*Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"*

And the lawyer said, "*The one who showed him mercy.*"

And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

That's our Lord's word to us also...."*You go, and do likewise.*"

It is so easy for us to arrange our lives so that we seldom even see those who are in need.....

What we choose to do with our free time, where we go on vacation, where we live, the way we drive to work....**it's so easy for us to just cross the road – like the priest and the Levite** – so we don't have to confront the need.

Jesus identifies Himself with the needy...the poor...the homeless...the 'disenfranchised'.

Paul says very bluntly: "*Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*"

So... **seek** the good of your neighbor....without questioning whether this is a brother or a sister.

"...love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

Along similar lines Paul writes to the Galatians: "*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*"

So when Jesus utters those remarkable words.... (*'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*)....it strikes us, doesn't it?

It's one thing to be counted as a servant of the Most High...to be called a follower of Jesus; a disciple. These are high privileges....

But here...& in thru-out NT....**Jesus so identifies himself with his people, it defies description.**

Yes...he identifies with the poor and downtrodden, but He especially identifies Himself with the household of faith

When Jesus appeared to Paul on the way to Damascus to persecute the believers there, Jesus asks, "Why are you persecuting me?"

At one point, Jesus had said to his disciples, "Whoever receives you receives me."

We have sometimes heard it said that **when God looks at us, He sees Jesus.**

I wonder....In some sense, could it also be said that when God looks at Jesus, He sees us?

Theologians call it 'union with Christ' and that truth pervades the New Testament...it is often spoken of by analogy or by metaphor or by undefined language and is **declared by the NT to be a mystery.**

For example, one of Paul's favorite expressions is "**in Christ**" ...or "in Him" ...or "in the Lord" or something like that. I read somewhere that he uses an expression like that 164 times in his letters.

We heard from Dan Cruver two weeks ago concerning the theology of adoption. J.I. **Packer** refers to adoption as "the heart of the gospel."

Adoption and union with Christ are two **perspectives that are intricately woven** together. Like adoption, our union with Christ stretches from eternity past to final redemption.

Paul says to the Ephesians, "*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... 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...*"

Jesus flatly says, "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*"

He must be referring to the "...good deeds done in God."

In his prayer for his disciples Jesus prays, "*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*"

As I said, it defies description. It is beyond my comprehension.

Brothers & sisters, I don't have any words that can help in our understanding....

....and I dare not go beyond what scripture says.

That's why all I can do is to read to you this handful of texts so that we may all stand in awe of what He has done in "incorporating" us into Him.

But that's not all.

It works both ways.

In speaking of his preaching of the fullness of God's word, Paul refers to "...*the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory.*"

To the church in Corinth: "*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*"

There's probably dozens of other texts I could read....but I'll stop there. (you're welcome)

Whenever I consider truth like this, I think of a phrase from 2 Peter where he is speaking of that final judgment: "*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...*"

We have been united with Christ.....what sort of people ought we to be?

I got to tell you guys something: yesterday I pulled out five books on theology to see what these guys had to say about our union with Christ. Louis Berkhof / Millard Erickson / Wayne Grudem / John Dagg / John Calvin....and I read some of it.

It's all good stuff....the church needs guys like these.

But in this case - I decided to leave it those smart guys to define the nature of our union and similar issues.

Ultimately, **what I desire for me & for you is for us to modify our lives.....**

...I **want us to call to remembrance His word** to us this morning:

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'