

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MATTHEW 25

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 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. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was lacking clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or lacking clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will answer them, ‘Amen I tell you: Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you did not give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you did not give me anything to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, lacking clothes and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they will also answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or lacking clothes or sick or in prison and did not serve you?’

⁴⁵ “At that time he will answer them, ‘Amen I tell you: Just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.’ ⁴⁶ And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”



How important is a judge? How important is a Supreme Court judge? How important is an election judge? I think many would argue a fair judge in our elections is essential to honest government.

So few wish to hear about a judgment. So many feel that Christians are judgment hatemongers. "*Judge not,*" they quote back to us. But Jesus says that so that we understand we will be judged based on the standard by which we judge others. Jesus tells the Pharisees to make a right judgment. Jesus sent prophets who would demand justice for the downtrodden. When we look around at unfairness, what do people truly want in the world? At the heart and core of every person is a craving for honest and upright judgment.

We Christians confess a last day, a judgment day. We expect Jesus to come and be our judge. "*On the last day He will come to judge the living and the dead.*" "*We believe that you will come to be our judge.*" Not only do we expect this, we eagerly await this, because we know our judge is non-partisan, the fairest judge we could imagine. This is because this judge was there at our creation and He paid for our redemption. This judge died for us, and we can trust Him.

There are some classic lessons in the Scriptures about judgment. I am confident today that you will find that the judgment of Jesus is right and fair, and you will ...

Wonder At The Judgment Of The Son

1. How to feed, welcome and clothe the Son

Nearly all the verbs are in the future tense for a future time. That time is still coming. Jesus will gather all people. Jesus will separate them into two groups. Here these two groups are called "sheep" and "goats."

Jesus will commend the sheep. Jesus will list the ways the sheep loved Him: *For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was lacking clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me (35-36).*

In so doing, Jesus will confuse the sheep. They will wonder at the thought that they served Him. “Lord, when?” they ask (37-39). When was He hungry and they fed Him, when was He a stranger and they welcomed Him? When was He sick and they took care of Him – in prison and they visited Him? They will be astounded. They will wonder at the credits He has counted toward them.

Jesus will correct the sheep. Whatever they do for others, they really are serving Jesus. How little Jesus will expect of them! The opportunities are left to the various callings of those who trust in Him. They do not have to sew little crosses into everything they did. They do not have to twist and shout about God to glorify Him in all they did. They simply serve their neighbor and live their faith, *working out their faith in love* (Gal. 5:6).

Jesus will also confuse the goats. The goats have not even done the least for the least. The goats will attempt to excuse themselves by wondering when helping Jesus was even an option. But they could not appeal to their works for comfort. They never had a good reason to do something like this, because in life they reject any relationship with Jesus. That is what has left them as goats.

So there will essentially be two groups. We naturally would like to be a part of the sheep. We would like to take part in the blessings of Jesus. We would naturally like to be blessed by Jesus’ Father, into the kingdom prepared for us since the foundation of the world. We would not like to depart from Jesus. We would not like those chilling words. In and of themselves they are a curse, nevermind the eternal fire.

You will notice there is no in-between, neutral afterlife. Jesus doesn’t talk about a place of purging sins away, or a waiting room in between heaven and hell. Jesus is very clear that there are two groups, not three, and that these groups are based on their relationship. As any Christian on his deathbed, the criminal on the cross next to Jesus was faced with two options, heaven or hell.

However, you may also notice that Jesus does not mention faith. In fact, if we are saying we are judged on the basis of serving others, we only have salvation by works, which flies in the face of everything Jesus and Paul have to say. Let us more closely examine the response of the sheep and let us learn ...

2. How to remain in wonder at the end

The sheep have no memory of doing these good deeds for the least. The goats do not either, but the sheep are surprised to learn there is even a tally for them. This indicates that the sheep will know their own sins and how guilty they ought to be before the judgment seat of the Son. They wonder at the thought that they have served the Lord. They wonder at the idea that He would commend them.

This humble self-deprecation of the sheep shows us that the sheep did their works naturally ... in many cases automatically. Of course they would serve their neighbors, even the least of them. Of course they would seize the day to be someone's Good Samaritan, even if it meant great risk of personal danger. They did not have to sew little crosses into everything they did. They did not have to twist and shout about God to glorify Him in all they did.

Check this by comparison to the attitude of the goats. They expected Jesus to count their good deeds somehow. They expected to be counted as His friends. But instead they are told about what they did not do. Their sin remains on them because they had no expression of love for Jesus. We would even say with Jesus that those without faith in Jesus stand judged already.

Therefore, these are all indicators that, in this parable, Jesus is describing faith. He is teaching salvation by faith alone as any master storyteller. He teaches salvation by faith with an emphasis on the judgment.

The sheep had done these works by faith in Jesus. *Everything that does not proceed from faith is sin*, Romans 14:23. *Without faith it is impossible to please God*, Hebrews 11:6. Meanwhile, *God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*, John 3:16. This is what we tell the world. However, in the context of faith-alone, we are immediately instructed to do what is good for others: *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works*, Ephesians 2:8-10. *If a man remains in Jesus, he will bear good fruit; without Jesus, you can do nothing*, John 15:5. We are even told to do what is good and right for others as if for Jesus Christ Himself: *He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker; but whoever is kind to the needy honors God*, Proverbs 14:31. Salvation is not suddenly by works. Jesus did not change His mind. However, their good works are placed in reference to Jesus Christ. We still wonder and marvel in loving awe that He would save us despite our sin. Amen.