

Judgment Day 3-19-06

Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV)

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² 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. 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; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?' ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' ⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

It is always important to find the context of the passage we are studying. Only then can we see it in the light of its original setting and properly interpret its intended meaning. That is why I begin almost every sermon with a review of the preceding text. Last week we covered the parable of the faithful and worthless stewards. Before that we looked at the parable of the ten virgins. Both of those parables were telling us that, in the time between the ascension and Second Coming, we are to be watching, ready and faithful. Our passage today emphasizes why, and gives us a practical picture of what that faithfulness looks like.

The eschatological time in which this takes place is either the beginning or the end of the millennium, depending on which scenario you subscribe to. In Revelation 20, John the Beloved describes something similar. ¹¹ *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.* ¹² *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.* Revelation 20:11-12 (NIV) Because of this passage, the final judgment is referred to as The Great White Throne Judgment. If our passage is at the end of the millennium, the throne referred to in the first verse is the Great White Throne. The

whiteness of the throne represents purity and truth. If it is at the beginning of the Millennium, it is the throne of David in Jerusalem. Whichever way you see it, the important point is that the day is coming, ³¹ *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.*

When Christ Jesus sits to judge, He will summon all of mankind before that throne. ³² *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.* ³³ *He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.* We will see later how Jesus makes that separation. (John 5:22) If you've ever seen a flock of sheep and goats you most likely saw them separated on their own. The sheep congregate together and the goats walk with the other goats. They may be side by side, but they stay in their own groups. It is natural for us to want to be among like kind.

Separation is the message of the first day of creation. ³ *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.* ⁴ *God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.* ⁵ *God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day.* Genesis 1:3-5 (NIV) Darkness is symbolic of evil in many New Testament references. (John 12:36) Physical darkness is not evil in and of itself, but is symbolic of it, just as light is symbolic of goodness and truth. In 1Thessalonians 5, the Apostle Paul writes that we are children of the day and not of the night or of darkness. (1Thessalonians 5:4-5) In a symbolic way then, the first day of creation included a dividing of what was good from what is evil. The two should not be mixed. That is also the picture behind the many Old Testament laws about not mixing unlike things such as fabrics or seeds or plow animals. (Deuteronomy 22:9-11) Those laws seems strange to us, but they are all a picture of purity and holiness not being mixed with evil. On the first day of eternity, God will do what He did on the first day of creation. He will make a separation. (2Corinthians 6:17)

You probably recall the parable of the wheat and the tares from Matthew 13. That sermon was over a year ago, but I hope it stuck with you. The children of God could not be separated from the children of the evil one until the time of the harvest. ⁴¹ *The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.* Matthew 13:41 (NIV) Today's teaching addresses that event. It will be a time of mixed emotions. Those who we have loved, who have set their heart against God, will forever be separated from us. How painful that will be. No wonder He will have to wipe away every tear from our eyes. (Revelation 21:4)

On the other hand, it will be a time of elation as we enter into all that God has prepared for us. ³⁴ *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.* We will see the souls of those who received the Good News from us and know that God watered that seed and brought it to maturity.

Just as I was preparing this, I received a call from Steve. I had told you the testimony of how came to Christ last month and decided to turn himself in and face

Commented [notes1]: 22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, John 5:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. John 12:36 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 1 Thess 5:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 9 Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled. 10 Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. 11 Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together. Deut 22:9-11 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." [2 Cor 6:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:4 (NIV)

the consequences of his actions. When he called, he had just left his probation officer and wanted to call and tell us he was doing well and going to a Bible believing church. I can rejoice now, but when I see him in amongst the sheep as we enter the kingdom of heaven, my joy will know no end. (Luke 15:7) What a day of mixed emotion!

Commented [notes7]: 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:7 (NIV)

Heaven would not be heaven with the rebellious there. How could a place that is filled with the worship of God be heaven if those who have rejected God in favor of selfishness were there? (Revelation 4:8) Nor would they want to be there. As our hearts swell with appreciation and love for all that God has done for us, we will be bursting forth with songs of adoration. (Revelation 5:9) If the wicked were there, they would find it revolting.

Commented [notes8]: 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." Rev 4:8 (NIV)

The kingdom of heaven is a very physical thing. The Bible describes it as on this earth, but an earth that has been cleansed by fire and made new. (Revelation 21:1-2) So what is it that has been prepared since the creation of the world? It is the family of God. When heaven, New Jerusalem, descends to the earth, it is described as the bride. It will be every perfected saint from Adam to the last person to come to Christ. If we are described as a city, we will all have an interactive roll with one another. Just think of your best friendships on earth. Now take away all the annoyances, and all the areas that you could not relate, and magnify the positive aspects a hundred times and you will have a glimpse of what is to come. Remember that Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us. (John 14:2-3)

Commented [notes9]: 9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Rev 5:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Rev 21:1-2 (NIV)

In addition to all the incredible acquaintances we will make, the Creator who made all the wonders of the earth as we know it, will certainly have prepared even more amazing creations for the new earth. It only took Him seven days to come up with all the variety and beauty we see here, imagine what He came up with over the last 2000 years!

Commented [notes11]: 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:2-3 (NIV)

But why us? If you recall the Revelation 20 description, you will remember it said that everyone would be judged by what he had done. There are record books. Now, this seems to go contrary to our faith and the plain declaration of Scripture that tells us we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. (Ephesians 2:8-9) But this passage in Matthew also seems to indicate that works are what we are judged by. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Commented [notes12]: 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph 2:8-9 (NIV)

How can we reconcile the two? How can the same Jesus say that if we believe in Him we would not perish but have everlasting life, (John 3:16) declare that we will be judged by our works? Thanks to James we have the missing link. Faith without works is dead. (James 2:15-17) It is not by a mere profession that you are saved. I can profess anything and not believe it. How do we know if someone has truly made Jesus the Lord of their life? Their life will demonstrate it. How do I know that Steve was truly born again? He changed! He quit rebelling against God and became obedient even if it cost him. He has a hunger for the word and for fellowship.

Commented [notes13]: 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph 2:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. James 2:15-17 (NIV)

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' Here is the interesting thing about people who have come under the Lordship of Christ. They do good things without giving it a second thought. They value every life because every soul was made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27) The love of Christ flows through them to others. It isn't worked up or forced. It just flows. (John 15:5)

Commented [notes15]: 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Gen 1:27 (NIV)

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Oh what a revelation this is! If you've ever wished you could have lived in the days Jesus walked the earth and done something to demonstrate your love for Him, here is your chance. You can buy Jesus a sandwich to ease His hunger. You can give Him a ride across town, or take Him shopping when He is no longer able to drive. You can visit Him when He is lonely. You can encourage Him when He is saddened. Every time you do it for the least of your brothers or sisters in Christ, you do it to Christ Himself. What an opportunity this presents to us.

Commented [notes16]: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NIV)

It also tells us of His wonderful heart, a heart that considers the least as if He Himself were in their shoes. That is how He feels with and for you. (Hebrews 4:15) That is how He feels with and for that grumpy neighbor, that cantankerous relative, and that clerk that is having a bad day. As you touch their life with His love, He considers it done to Him personally. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Commented [notes17]: 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Heb 4:15 (NIV)

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Hell was never meant for man. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. God is not willing that any should perish. (2Peter 3:9) But the self-worship of many will demand that they too receive what is just. They refused the Lordship of Christ. They insisted on being their own selfish god. When the books of the deeds of man are opened, there will be no evidence of a transformed heart. The heart that was born in sin refused the wooing of the Holy Spirit and chose instead to remain in rebellion against God. Their actions will confirm the decision they made. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

Commented [notes18]: 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

When need presents itself to those in sin, they turn away. They are not willing to think of any needs except their own. The actions that appeared to be selfless and kind were merely hypocritical actions to exalt themselves in others eyes. (Isaiah 29:13) As Jesus said of the Pharisees, "Every thing they do is done for men to see." Matthew 23:5a (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

In their blindness they will answer in the same way that the sheep answered. ⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' They could not recognize

Christ in their fellow man. They refused to see the image of God in each soul. Like the priest and Pharisee that turned from the wounded man on the road to Jericho, they always had a reason not to help those in need. (Luke 10:30-32)

⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' A sinful heart can think of nothing but selfish interests, self-promotion, and self-justification. Because they turn their backs on the Holy Spirit when He shined into their lives, they turned their back on their fellow man in their hour of need. (1John 2:11) Jesus is personally insulted and devalued when we, with a hard heart, pass the needy by. (Amos 2:6-7)

⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." The separation will be final and complete. If it was not, heaven would not be heaven and hell would not be hell. Part of the justice handed to us is to be with those who are like us. Consider that! What you sow, you will also reap.

I'm reminded of a story that reveals so much about human nature. A family in a mini van pulled up to a full serve gas pump. The attendant could see a happy family. The father, who was driving, politely asked if the man could check his oil and fill his tank. They talked pleasantly about the town and their families. Then the father paid the attendant and tipped him nicely. Asking about that town he said, "We are looking for a nice place to raise our children." The attendant asked about the last town they were from. "Oh, it was a good city. We had a nice church and people were friendly and helpful. The place where I worked closed, so we decided it was time to move." The attendant said, "I think you'll find this town to be just like the one you left."

Later that day another van pulled in with the same story. The driver wasn't as polite and ignored the attendant while the kids screamed away at each other in the back seats. After paying the attendant, the man said, "Hey kid, what's this town like? We're thinking of moving here?" The attendant asked him what the town was like where they came from. He replied, "It was terrible. People only looked out for themselves, unfriendly, pushy, and rude. I'll never go back. "Well", the attendant said, "I think you'll find this town to be just like the one you left."

That was a wise attendant. We will reap what we have sown. (Galatians 6:7) We will see what we focus upon. (Hebrews 12:2) The nature of our heart will betray us, not only in this life, but on the Day of Judgment. It doesn't matter if you said the magic words, "Jesus come into my heart." What matters is if your heart was changed. Is He your Lord? Has the change affected how you see the world around you? Has it changed how you live your life? Does Jesus in you reach out to the needs of those you meet? Is your life self focused or Christ focused? God can transform a goat into a sheep. (Ephesians 2:3) He is a miracle working God who promises to transform those who come to Him. Do you need that heart transformation this morning? If you do, come forward as we sing, and ask the Lord for a new heart, a heart that accepts His reign in your life. The day is coming when we will all stand before that throne and give an account. What is written in that book about you?

Commented [notes20]: 30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.
Luke 10:30-32 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.
1 John 2:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 6 This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals.
7 They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.
Amos 2:6-7 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.
Gal 6:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
Heb 12:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.
Eph 2:3 (NIV)