

LESSON 13
February 23, 2025

Unit III: Life in God's Kingdom

Don't Be a Goat

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 25

PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 25:31-46

KEY VERSES

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in. (Matthew 25:34-35, KJV)

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“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. 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.’” (Matthew 25:34-35, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Investigate Jesus' criteria for responsible kingdom living in the parable of the sheep and the goats.
- Identify where one's values align/fall short of Jesus' standards.
- Feel motivated to participate in church ministries that serve the “least of these.”

*Key Terms

Glory (verse 31)—Greek: *doxa* (dox'-ah): opinion (always good in NT)—hence praise, honor; renown; an especially divine quality; the unspoken manifestation of God; splendor.

Inherit (verse 34)—Greek: *kléronomeó* (klay-ron-om-eh'-o): to obtain (possess) by inheritance; acquire; to be an heir; “take your inheritance” (NIV).

Righteous (verse 37)—Greek: *dikaios* (dik'-ah-yos): correct; by implication, innocent; just (especially in the eyes of God); upright; virtuous; keeping the commands of God.

Separate (verse 32)—Greek: *aphorizō* (af-or-id'-zo): to set off by boundary, i.e., (figuratively) limit, exclude, appoint, etc.; divide; sever.



The Biblical Context

The broader context of Matthew 25 is the Olivet Discourse, an extensive and significant teaching that Jesus delivered to His disciples on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. Each of the Synoptic Gospels records this event, but Matthew's account is the most in-depth. Jesus' primary focus is the end times or *eschatology*, the events leading up to the world's end as we know it now. The occasion was Jesus' response to questions posed by His disciples following His prophecy regarding Jerusalem and the Temple's destruction. Along with this prophecy, other vital elements include signs of His return (see Matthew 24:1-4), warnings regarding future perilous times preceding His return (see Matthew 24:15-28), a description of His glorious return (see Matthew 24:29-31), parables and warnings emphasizing the need for readiness and faithfulness among His followers (see Matthew 25:1-30), and the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).

Set (verse 33)—Greek: *istēmi* (his'-tay-mee): to cause or make to stand; to place; set up; to make firm, fix; establish; "put" (NIV).

Thirsty (verse 35)—Greek: *dipsaó* (dip-sah'-o): to suffer thirst; have thirst for; desire earnestly.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

Introduction

For centuries, African-American worshippers (and other believers) have sung songs about the end-times, Judgment Day, and heaven. Such songs include "Great Day," a spiritual emphasizing the great Day of Judgment when the Lord will separate the righteous from the wicked, and "That Great Gettin' Up Morning," which expresses the joyous anticipation of being resurrected, seeing God and overcoming the world, and leaving behind the troubles of this life. Most commonly, the lyrics allude to the rewards that the righteous inherit rather than God's judgment and evaluation of their lives. Nonetheless, one thing that is sure according to the Word is that every living soul will face judgment by God: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10, NIV). Therefore, the

essential thing for believers to consider while they are still alive is their readiness to meet their Maker. To that end, God provided directions for those who want to be ready for judgment. For example, Jesus, in Matthew 24:42-44, admonishes His followers to remain vigilantly prepared for His return at any unexpected moment. The apostle Peter emphasizes the importance of living holy in anticipation of the final judgment (see 2 Peter 3:11-14). James warns believers to be aware of life's transient nature and mindful of God's authority and the unpredictability of life (see James 4:13-14). On the earth, we are judged based on known and unknown standards. In contrast, in the final judgment, God will evaluate us based on the righteous standards established in His Word. At the end of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus told the disciples that He would judge Jews and Gentiles when He returns to reign on His throne during His millennial kingdom. The basis of each one's evaluation will be their demonstrated response to the needs of others.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Here Comes the Judge! (*Matthew 25:31-33*)

KJV

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

NIV

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 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.”

During the Olivet Discourse (see Matthew 24–25), Jesus delivered several parables instructing His followers on how they should live while waiting for His return. He now transitions to a description of the judgment that takes place at the Second Coming. Jesus will return in glorious splendor as the Son of Man, accompanied by His angels; He will sit on His glorious throne as judge and King (**verse 31**). Opinions differ regarding the timing of this glorious event, but it initiates Christ’s millennial or one-thousand-year reign in His earthly kingdom. Christ will begin His reign with a judgment that immediately divides people into two groups, like a shepherd separating sheep from goats at night (**verse 32**). Those identified as sheep are placed on His right hand, and goats on His left (**verse 33**). Since sheep are symbolized as God’s people in Scripture and being on the “right” denotes favor, these people are the righteous or the saved in this context. Consequently, the goats on the left (a sign of disfavor) are the unrighteous or unsaved.

There is scholarly debate about the reference to “all nations” in this verse. Some suggest that “all nations” refers to Gentiles surviving the Tribulation, whom Christ will judge individually or—as all the people on the earth at this time—unbelievers or non-Jews. However, the significant message is that Christ will return as judge and King. Judgment is an inevitable fact that no one escapes, and each individual, whether saved or not, Jew or Gentile, will stand in His presence for judgment and assigned to one of only two categories—the righteous or unrighteous, reward or condemnation. Hence, no one can afford to overlook or minimize the urgency for each believer to prioritize and prepare for the final judgment and its impact on how we live now.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What things distract believers from focusing on and preparing for God’s final judgment?

Eternal Acceptance (*Matthew 25:34-40*)

KJV

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

NIV

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, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

In these verses, Christ reveals the criteria He will use in this judgment. Specifically, He will look at the service they have extended to people in need (**verses 34-36**). First, Jesus invited those on His right, those blessed by God, to receive the inheritance prepared for those who accepted His offer of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 1:4; Romans 8:29). He then listed the practical ways that this group served Him with good deeds representing the authenticity of their salvation. When those on His right heard this surprising commendation, they asked when they performed these deeds for Him, repeating each of them in their question (**verses 37-39**). Jesus responded to their question with a profound revelation applicable to believers in every generation. He explains that when they met others’ needs compassionately and lovingly, they were serving Him (**verse 40**). Therefore, when believers, individually and

collectively, love and serve the suffering and needy, they prove the authenticity of their faith in, love for, and devotion to God. When believers show unconditional love and care for others, they are loving and caring for Jesus Himself. As we heed Christ's admonition to "be ready" for His return and the final judgment, we must be faithful and diligent about serving Him by serving others with sincere hearts.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How should Jesus' criteria for judgment in this context shape or direct the church's mission and ministries?

Eternal Separation (*Matthew 25:41-46*)

KJV

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

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.'

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, 'Truly I tell you, 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."

First, Christ the judge will address those on His right, welcoming and inviting them to take their positions of honor in His earthly kingdom. He so identifies with the plight of the suffering that He will receive all genuine acts of kindness on their behalf as if they were

personally extended to Him. Christ will then address those on His left, “the goats,” branding them accursed and banished to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (**verse 41**). He then explains why He dismisses them to endure eternal separation from His presence (**verses 42-43**). Unlike those on His right, this group failed to follow Him faithfully, doing nothing to aid others in their greatest need. The “goats” were guilty of the sins of neglect and omission. This group will also question Jesus concerning His assessment of their lives (**verse 44**). Jesus’ response cites their failure to serve Him, as demonstrated by the inherent refusal to meet others’ needs. Their actions, or lack thereof, in this case, proved their lack of faith in Jesus, thus causing unnecessary and avoidable suffering in the world (**verse 45**).

Jesus concludes by explaining the reason for their unfortunate fate by repeating the final destinies of these two groups—eternal life with Him or eternal separation from Him (**verse 46**). Yet again, believers are reminded that faith in Christ is demonstrated by loving and caring for others without discrimination. Believers are saved by grace, and their final destiny is secure, but rewards at the final judgment are determined and given based on works, deeds, or conduct that prove their faith’s genuineness. Therefore, we must make compassionate living a priority as we use our spiritual gifts, talents, and skills to meet others’ needs.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why should teaching the reality and consequences of the final judgment be integral to Christian education ministries?

A Closing Thought

Matthew 25:31-46 is one among other biblical passages teaching the certainty of a final judgment. Jesus lays out the criteria for judgment and its two possible consequences. Although judgment is inevitable, the question to consider is whether or not we’re preparing for it. We must be thankful that God’s Word informs us of exactly how to ensure our readiness to stand in His presence on that critically important day. The lesson challenges us to reexamine how we treat others and meet their needs. Those who take Jesus’ words seriously and apply them will prioritize compassionate living and seize every opportunity to minister to the needy, the suffering, the oppressed, and the marginalized.

Your Life

The glaring message in this lesson is the believer’s non-negotiable responsibility to serve Christ by serving others. This week, live out your faith by intentionally seeking out someone with a physical or spiritual need that you can meet. Make serving others a habit.

Your World!

The faith community does not have to look far to encounter the poor, sick, incarcerated, and/or lonely. Pray and consider a practical mission project that your congregation, class, or

ministry can organize to make a meaningful difference in people's lives. You may not be able to touch everyone, but, together, you can certainly touch someone.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, help us give guaranteed evidence of our faith and love for You by following Jesus' example and expectation that we serve others' needs with compassion. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

The lesson topic for Sunday, March 2, 2025, is "Bound by Love." The Devotional Reading is Leviticus 19:1-10, the Background Scripture is Exodus 19, and the Print Passage is Exodus 19:1-14.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, February 24	"We Are Priests"	(Revelation 1:3-8)
TUESDAY, February 25	"Give Thanks to God's Holy Name"	(Psalm 106:36-48)
WEDNESDAY, February 26	"Be Holy"	(Leviticus 19:1-10)
THURSDAY, February 27	"Love Your Neighbor as Yourself"	(Leviticus 19:11-18)
FRIDAY, February 28	"Priests of God and Christ"	(Revelation 20:1-6)
SATURDAY, March 1	"Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly"	(Micah 6:1-8)
SUNDAY, March 2	"Treasured Possession"	(Exodus 19:1-14)

NOTES
