
Spiritual Formation Part 11

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Matthew 25: 31- 46

The Sheep and the Goats

Are you a sheep or a goat? The foolish will be judged and removed from the wise; the wasteful and fearful will be separated from those who love and trust in Christ (Matt. 25:14-30). This parable is about the coming, final, inescapable Judgment! There was a judgment that was escapable, when the Jews could flee from their homes and business as the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. But, this time there will be no escape; all will be judged! It is about evaluation and separation; the good are set apart from the bad! The faithful are rewarded; the unfaithful are damned. The wise are praised and the foolish are judged (Matt. 25:1-46). Those who are in Christ will receive their blessings, and those who willfully reject Him will be cursed! This is a harsh teaching; nonetheless, it is true, and it will happen (Rom. 3:23; 6:23)!

Many people go to church and claim to be Christians. But, when it comes down to it, many are not living in the Spirit. Their faith is based on their identity—that they go to church—not that Christ has a hold on their lives (Rom. 8:9). These are the goats who hang with the sheep, but they are pretenders and fakers who trust in themselves and not in the Lord. If all you see in life is yourself, your works, or your heritage, you may have a big, eternal problem leering at you! We must be aware that the goats will be taken; make sure you are not a goat, but rather a sheep, one who loves the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and whose identity is in Christ (Mark 12:29-31; John 10:14; 27-30). At His second coming, Jesus will be looking for those who are prepared and faithful.

- *When the Son of Man comes.* This refers to Christ's reign on earth, predicted by Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14). This is a depiction of our Lord's absolute authority over the apocalypse, judging all who have ever lived, and of both His omnipresence and omniscience.
- *Angels.* Jesus is perhaps quoting Zechariah 14:5. Angels are important and powerful in Jewish mysticism; however, Jesus is the Judge who will evaluate us as to whether we are saved or not, and reward us for how we served and represented Him (Psalm 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 18:30; Daniel 7:13-14.).
- *All nations will be gathered.* This is the Judgment to come; no one will be immune or have a “get-out-of-jail-free card,” unless he or she is in Christ (Isa. 2:4 Mic. 4:3).

- *Sheep and goats.* Both the sheep and the goats grazed together and were herded together; they were both for food; the sheep gave clothing and the goats gave milk and cheese. At night, they were separated. The sheep needed the outdoors, for their fur kept them warm; the goats needed to be inside or they might freeze to death. Sheep were much more valuable to the Jews because of the necessity of clothing they provided and the income from the selling of the wool. Sheep are the representation of God's chosen people (Ezek. 34; Matt. 10:16; 18:12). In pagan literature, goats were associated with the devil and being bad, whereas sheep were representative of good. Do you realize who you are in Him? As His child, do you realize how much He loves you, how valuable you are?
- *Separate.* The segregation referred to individuals, not nations as a whole. Nations referred to all people groups.
- *Right hand...left.* In ancient customs, the right side was the place of authority and power, whereas the left was for guests or those in trouble.
- *Inherit the Kingdom* refers to those who have been predestined (Romans 8). We are being prepared for His Kingdom and glory!
- *The King*, in most Jewish parables, usually referred to God; here, it refers to Jesus as God.
- *For I was hungry.* This is ethics in action. Do we do as He says? Do we do as we say we do? Most people, who claim Christ as their Lord, do little to nothing in service to Christ! He is either LORD or lord! Yet, we will rationalize that we do serve Him, even those we do not. Jesus calls us on this! We have to realize when we are in Christ we are called to serve others, too. This does not affect our salvation, but demonstrates our sincerity and heart.
- *Food, drink, stranger, poor, naked and sick* were all acceptable means of service for the first century Jew; however, visiting a *prison* would have been a very radical proclamation. Jesus calls us to be radical in our service and mature in our attitude and faith!
- *My brethren.* This passage actually textually refers to the disciples as the objects, not just the poor and needy (Matt. 10:40-42; 12:48-49; 18:14). It is through us, the Christians, that the Gospel is proclaimed, hence the necessity of being a good witness (Rom. 10:14)!
- *When did we see You?* This is a standard Jewish "counter question" to shift responsibility. We need to realize that all people are God's children—saved or not, because He created us; when we serve people, we are serving Him (Mal. 1:6-7)! This passage is also about responsibility, and not shifting the blame for our lack of obedience and faith back on others or God.

- *Do it for one.* Service is what ethics is about—how we demonstrate what we claim to believe—how we are to serve humanity with compassion and without seeking a return, as it is an eternal investment, not an earthly one.
- Kindness and stewardship happen when we serve the Lord with what He gives us. It shows our love and unveils our possibilities and opportunities. When we ignore His call, we show our contempt and defilement.
- *Say to those on the left.* This is about judgment. Jewish literature teaches that those nations who wronged Israel will be judged. Jesus takes the focus to how we were obedient with His call to the poor and oppressed (Matt. 12:50; 28:10). As we go out to proclaim the Word, how we are treated will bring judgment on those who have done ill to His servants (Matt. 5:19; 11:11; 18:4; 20:26; 23:11). Missionaries need all the services the poor do, too! Receiving a servant of the Lord is the same as receiving Christ Himself (Matt. 10:40-42)!
- *Depart from me.* The sentence is eternal! Before the Judgment can take place, the news of the Kingdom needs to be told (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20).
- Destruction and judgment, according to the Jewish Qumran Community (Dead Sea Scrolls, “war scroll”), was not God’s original plan for His people (Exodus 33:19; 34:6; Psalm 67:1; 1 Tim. 2:4; James 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:3; 1 John 4:8-10). When sin entered in, the utopia ended and now evil must be put off (2 Peter 2:4-12).
- *Everlasting fire/ punishment* refer to Hell, as in eternal punishment. The punishment of Hell is endless; so it is with the eternal blessed life of the Christian who is saved by grace. This is why evangelism and witnessing are so important (1 Cor. 15:1-4). We need to proclaim Christ as Savior to help save people from this eternal damnation (Matt. 18:8; John 5:24)!
- *Hell* is a real place, not an idea to keep people in line!
- *Eternal.* God is a God of eternity—always is, and always will be, as will be Hell (1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 5:13; 19:3; 20:10). Some Jews believed in Hell; however, they were divided as to what it was, when it will take place, and for how long it will last. Most believed it was just for a short duration. Jesus makes it clear that Hell and Judgment are real, and they are coming. We must be prepared in our spiritual formation and our proclamation to others! The Great News in Judgment is the elect; those saved by God will be spared and rewarded (Dan. 12:2)! Why must there be Hell? Because, God is holy (Neh. 9:32-33; Isaiah 6:3; 2 Thess. 1:6; Rev. 4:8), and hates sin, and because He cannot be contaminated or touched by it (Psalm 5:5-6; Hab. 1:13). Thus, God punishes the sinner because of his or her evil (Jer. 50:31; Ezek. 44:12; Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:9; Heb. 10:29; Jude 7-13).

When Jesus comes back, it will be magnificent, but it will also be a time of extreme anguish, as people will be separated and condemned for their blatant foolishness in not accepting Christ as Lord. It will also be a time of condemnation, woe, and guilt, as there will be judgment for those who wasted the gifts and opportunities He gave. We all will be surprised to see who made it and who did not! What Christian leaders will be there, and which ones will not? Which ministry will be praised and which ones will not? Those we think are the real Christians may turn out to be pretenders, and those we toss aside, thinking they are not worthy, may be the heroes, as we look at pride and accomplishments; God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Even in the mist of fear and woe, make no mistake. Christ's return will be glorious, and present us, the faithful, with commendation, victory, and security. We will receive our rewards and our proper place! We will see that all we went through in life had a purpose and a reason, and we will see the people who benefited, the souls that were saved, and the work that gave Him glory. We will see clearly what our life was about and what it meant to Christ and to others. We will say, yes, *it was worth it! I am glad I remained faithful!* Faithfulness, even when it is hard, is well worth it, as nothing else we do is greater than what we do for our Lord. Our works do not earn our salvation. His grace paid for that; but, why be one who is foolish when we can be the victorious, faithful sheep!

Questions

1. Have you ever received a reward or a prize for an accomplishment you did? How did you feel? How do you feel knowing, as a person of faith, you will be rewarded by Christ Himself?
2. How can knowing that the faithful will be rewarded and the unfaithful will be damned help you to have more confidence in your growth and service?
3. Those who are in Christ will receive blessings, and those who willfully reject Him will be cursed. Is this fair? Yes or no? Why?
4. At His second coming, Jesus will be looking for those who are prepared and faithful. What have you learned to help you be prepared?
5. How does this passage tell us about our Lord's absolute authority?
6. What can you learn from this passage about being responsible?
7. How we serve and represent Him will also be a factor in our Judgment (not salvation but, rather, rewards). How does this motivate you to grow further? Or, does it scare you?
8. How can this passage give you a sense of victory, hope, and comfort?

9. How would you define ethics?
10. What are some things you have done which demonstrate your sincerity and heart?
11. Jesus calls us to be radical in our service, and mature in our attitude and faith! What does this mean to you?
12. How does our love and kindness unveil the possibilities and opportunities Jesus gives us? What happens when we do not do this?
13. Before the Judgment can take place, the news of the Kingdom needs to be told. How far along do you think we, as a world-wide Christian community, are in this?
14. Do you think destruction and judgment were God's original plans for His people (Psalm 67:1; 1 Tim. 2:4; James 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:3; 1 John 4:8-10)?
15. How does God's judgment show His love? (Remember, one of the aspects of love is that it protects!)
16. Why must there be a Hell? How does the fact that Hell is an actual place make you feel? Does it motivate you; do you get mad at God; or?
17. What do you think life will be like when Jesus comes back?
18. How can you make your life count for His glory?
19. What do you need to do to focus on how you can be more obedient with His call to the poor and oppressed?
20. Christ's return will be glorious and present us, the faithful, with commendation, victory, and security. How can this fact give you confidence and help build your faith?

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