

THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

Message 19

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

INTRO: In the first message on this parable we looked at Matthew 25:31-32a (read). We said we have two events here that are separated by a period of time. The first event is when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven with all His holy angels. The second event is when He sits on the throne in His glory to judge the nations. We saw that many events happen in between these two. Some Jews who have fled Jerusalem are holed up in the hills, and the Lord goes there to liberate them. Jerusalem is in the death-grips of the enemy, and the Lord delivers them. This is clear from Zechariah 14. The battle of Armageddon then takes place. And in my view, when all is said and done before the people of Matthew 25 are gathered together for judgment, all unbelievers will have died.

Well, look at Matthew 25:31-32, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." And let me now ask you this question I did not have time for in the last message: Where will this judgment take place? Washington DC? Moscow? Well, or Ottawa? Certainly not in Ottawa. Or, could it be Jerusalem? Or can we even know?

Well, some connect the judgment of our passage with the judgment spoken of in Joel 3 and Zechariah 14. But I think what we have here is a different judgment. But since the judgment or battle of those passages takes place in Israel, and from all other Biblical data, I have no doubt this judgment will be in Israel, and beyond that, I believe it will be in Jerusalem.

And now, in Matthew 25, we begin with the judgment of the two groups who will be judged. Look at 25:32 (read). Remember, all the people alive on earth at this time are in the people gathered before the Lord for judgment. Millions of people have been trampled in judgment by the Lord Himself. As I interpret Scripture, all those who do not profess salvation have died. The antichrist and false prophet have been cast alive into hell. The devil and his hordes have been bound in hell. And for the first time in man's history, all physical and spiritual opposition to Almighty God comes to an end and silence rules over this planet.

Only true believers and professing believers are left. And now, these last two groups will be judged. And so our parable begins by calling these two groups left alive on earth, sheep and goats.

3. The Interpretation

a. The sheep

So, we begin our interpretation of this parable by looking at the sheep of Matthew 25:32b-40. The setting for this parable is given like this in 25:31-32a, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him..."

And now, in verse 32b, after all the goats and sheep are gathered before the Lord, it says, "And He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from his goats." Now, there is something very important to learn here. Let us read verses 34-36 (read). Now, once more, as in the previous parable, let me ask you, were they saved by works? The Lord says to those who did all these good things, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But our question is, will they inherit this kingdom because of what they did? Did they inherit this kingdom by works?

Well, go back to verse 33 (read). I want you to notice very carefully the basis on which they were divided. What was it? The division was based on whether they were sheep or goats. You see, they were separated into their groups, not on the basis of what they did, but on the basis of what they...???? ... were!!!

The first time I was in Israel I saw a scene that brought this passage visibly to mind. A young shepherd boy with a stick in his hand had a mixed group of sheep and goats before him. And when he wanted to separate them, he went toward them with his stick and the sheep immediately bunched up into a group and stayed, and the goats fled. By their very nature they were separated. That is what we

have here. Sheep will do what sheep will do. Sheep cannot help being sheep.

Look now at verses 34-36 (read). In verse 34, we have the King on His throne. From verse 31 we have no trouble interpreting that this King is the capital K King. And He says the sweetest words any of His followers will ever hear. Listen to those words again, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

So, from verses 34-36 it sounds as if they were divided on the basis of what they did. But the facts are they did what they did on the basis of what they were. I have not had much to do with sheep, nor with goats. But only a little contact with these two different kinds of animals will show a non-farmer like me some very major differences. I took care of my daughter and son-in-law's farm for a few days. One of their goats was already overdue and I was to keep an eye on her. And one morning, as I fed the goats, that particular goat came for the feed and then went back and came and went back. And I said, "Aha, something has happened here." And sure enough, there were two brand new baby miniature goats. And when they came out of the barn on their little wobbly legs, they found a few roots that had grown out of the ground a few inches, and there they were trying to get all four feet on the top of those roots. Goats cannot help being goats! Sheep cannot help being sheep.

Now, in our passage the sheep are separated from the goats. They were separated, not on the basis of what they did. They did what they did because of what they were. Don't tell me you are a Christian if you don't live the way a Christian should. You will reveal what you are by what you do. If you are living in sin, you need to question your salvation.

I had said in a message that because of what happened in our church a year ago, I was troubled because it seemed I might have accepted as church members those who were not even born again. How would a believer commit such very wicked sin? And I ask, how could a person have a shepherds heart and

not be troubled about that? But one of those folk questioned one of our folk and said, "If you don't follow this guy, will he question your salvation too?" But you see, it is not who one follows but what one does that raises this question. I ask do Christians do things like those that were done? Serious question, is it not? You see, sheep do not quack. Why? Because they are not ducks. And when sheep quack, surely you must ask what is under the wool.

Now, you see, sheep will be sheep, just as Christians will be Christians. And just what do Christians do? Well, this judgment takes place just after the tribulation. And one of the greatest tests in the tribulation will be how you treat the Lord in the time of great persecution, and we will look at this closer later. But how they treated the Lord was determined by how they treated fellow Christians.

May I ask you, how much fear of man do you have? If we live our lives based on what others will think, it is most likely we will never hear words like this. May I ask you, do you live in such a way that some day you might hear these words: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:." Oh, the fear of man, it bringeth a snare.

I want you to see the response of the sheep to the Lord's words in verses 37-39 (read). They said, "We don't know what you are talking about. When did we do all these things? You must have the wrong group. We didn't do all this." Now let me make an observation. When you do something as a Christian in order to gain acceptance by doing, you don't ask questions like these people did. You have kept track of the good things you did. We saw that in Matthew 7, from those who said, "Lord, Lord, have we not done this and that and the other in Your name?" They said that, not because they had not done that, but they had done it for the wrong reason. They were goats.

But look at the Lord's answer in verse 40 (read). Now we have an important task before us. You see,

we must answer, "Who are those called, 'least of these My brethren'?" There is a view that this refers to the Jews, meaning Jesus' blood brothers. My wife and I took many correspondence courses from a man by name of Dr. Harold Willmington. And he said that these are Jesus' blood brothers, the Jews. And the view put forth is that here is the judgment of the Gentiles, and they are judged on the basis of how they treated the Jews. Well, in the tribulation, even more so than now, that truly will be a real test. We need only think of Corrie Ten Boom's story, and there are many others.

But the more I have considered that view over the years, the more I think that it is not correct. Believing Jews or Jews who profess to believe will be judged just as well as the Gentiles. I think that these brethren of the Lord are not physical brethren, as in the Jews; but spiritual brethren, as in true Christians. Christians will suffer horribly in the tribulation. Most of them will be martyred. They will be hungry. They can't buy or sell because they won't take the number 666. They will be thirsty, because they have to hide out. They will be strangers and pilgrims in the world because they are the off-scouring of the earth. They will be put in prison. They will suffer, suffer, suffer. And those who dare help them will be in danger every time. And why do they risk their lives for them? Because Christians will do what Christians will do.

Turn to Matthew 10. I believe that Matthew 10 beginning in verse 16 and on speaks especially of the 7 year tribulation. This chapter is one I see as giving two related events that are divided by a long time period, and we have covered that in earlier message. But look at it (read 16-27). In this chapter Jesus sent out the 12 disciples. But I believe verses 16 to the end of the chapter have special reference to the tribulation time. Let me show you this (Two worlds minus church age).

Now in the tribulation millions will be martyred. They are shown us in Revelation 7. So look at Matthew 10:28 (read). And He comforts them with verses 29-31. Then consider how hard it will be to

confess Christ before men in that time in verses 32-33 (read). Now note what He says in verses 34-37 (read). Let me add that though I believe those words have special reference to the tribulation, they have often been fulfilled in the history of the Church and they are still being fulfilled today.

Now look at verses 38-42. And in light of all this, Matthew 25:34-36 says, "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'" "

So, what I see is that in the tribulation it will be very hard to stand up for Christ or for other Christians. And Jesus, referring to how Christians treated other Christians, says, "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me." It is my conclusion that the words, "these My brethren" refers to Christians, not Jews in particular.

There came a time in Jesus' busy ministry that His mother and brothers came to see Him. Go to Matthew 12. (Read 46-47 as follows), "While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.'" Now a question we might raise is, why would both Jesus' mother and brothers come to see Him, and that, when He is busy teaching? And there are those who think that Jesus' step-father, Joseph, had passed away and that is why both His mother and brothers are there. I think that is well possible.

Now listen to verses 48-49, "But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and

who are My brothers?' And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers!'" And so I think in our passage, the words, 'these My brethren' speak of Christians.

But we have skipped over something in verses 34-36 this far. It is verse 34 and it says, "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..." You see, we said the judgment of this chapter is the sign of the end of the age. The new age, the age to come, begins after this.

I wish for a moment I could transport you forward to this time. Let me just say this, there is no sorrow, no trouble, no price for a biblical stand that will not be repaid over and over and over again. You do not want to miss out. May I tell you young people the pleasure of sin is very momentary? But living for the Lord is eternal.

b. The goats

But look now at the goats of our parable in 25:41-46 (read). First, verse 41 gives some of the most fearful words anybody will ever hear. One of our folk was told recently that he had been told that breaking a covenant was not very serious. I wonder if anyone would say that when he or she stands before the King of kings and the Lord of lords? If ever we will wish we had stayed with our agreements here on earth, it will be when we stand before the Lord in judgment.

Now we must ask ourselves a question here. It is not hard to know who the sheep of the first part of this parable are. The NT sets true Christians out as sheep. But we must ask now, who are these goats? Are they all the unbelievers of all the nations? Are they Muslims? Are they atheists? Are they the Mormans who have store of food for two years in their homes?

Well, look at verses 41-44 (read). Now let me ask you, would men like Richard Dawkins say, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger

or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to You?" Do you think Bill Nigh would say something like that? Of course not. Do you know what Richard Dawkins said he would say? I'm not sure he really would do that, but here is what he said he would say, "In the unlikely event that I see God after I die, I think the first thing I would say is, 'Well, which god are you? Are you Zeus...?' and then he lists a list of other gods and then He goes on, '...and why did You take such great pains to hide Yourself away from us?'"

Or do you think Muslims would say, "Lord...?" They might say, "Allah", but not Lord. Who would say the words recorded here? Listen to Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Does this not sound like the goats of our passage?

Well, it seems to me that this group, known as goats here, represents professing believers. It seems that even in the tribulation, when people show propensity for interest in God, the demons deceive them into a false conversion. They call Jesus, "Lord..." And beyond that, they think they have done the right thing. But goats will be goats. Unbelievers can do yet so much good, and be workers of iniquity. And so, as I have mentioned in another message, it seems to me that when we come to this judgment, there are only believers and professing believers left on earth.

Let me show you where I get that beside this passage. We go to Revelation 19:16-21. The Lord Jesus has just come down from heaven with His Church following on white horses (read 16-21).

Now I want you to notice something else. In Matthew 7:21-23, it says, "Many will say to Me in THAT day." And we must ask, what day? And I believe it

is in the day described in our passage. And, as I interpret this passage, the people who said, "Lord, Lord, have we not cast out demons etc..." are this second group, the goats of Matthew 25:41-44.

Now note that goats will be goats. Jesus gave the same list of things of these goats that he gave of the sheep, but they are all in the negative. I was hungry and you did not give Me anything to eat etc.. But notice how they respond in verse 44 (read). Let me make an observation about people who do good things with the wrong motivation. They remember what they have done. And they think they are Christians because of what they have done.

I ask you again, who are these people? Are they wicked unbelievers, like Richard Dawkins or Muslims? Surely these are not professing athiests. They would not ask questions like this. As Richard Dawkins said he would say, "Who are you? Budha?" Nor are they Muslims. They might say, "Allah, when did we not kill the infidels in Your name? When did we not do Jihad?" These kind of people are not interested in feeding people. They are interested mocking Christianity or in killing Jews or infidels. Who are these people? I think only professing Christians fit those described as goats here!

Goats will be goats. You see, a person acts on the basis of what he is, not on the basis of what he says. And these people expect to receive on the basis of what they did, not on the basis of what they are. And look now at verse 46 (read). These will go away into everlasting punishment. But they said they had helped others. They had fed the hungry and given them drink. They had taken in the stranger, and clothed the naked and visited the sick and visited those who were in prison.

If I am right in connecting these people with those in Matthew 7 who said, "Lord, Lord", then they have a list of other good things they had done that they thought would give them brownie points in the judgment. Listen to what they said, "'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your

name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Now go back to the rewards of the sheep in 25:34, and then come back to verse 46 and notice the difference between the sheep and the goats in judgment (read).

4. The Application

Now let me draw a few applications. First, one that applies to Matthew 24:3 (read). Here we have three questions. And the last one is, "What will be the sign of the end of the age?" There are two great ages given in Scripture; this age, and the age to come. And the disciples question is, "What sign will indicate that the end of the age (that is this age) is near?" And I believe the parable we have just looked at gives the answer to that question. I am planning one more message as summary to the parables we have covered and show what else happens at the end of this age and the beginning of the true new age?

The second application I want to make is to those who might enter the tribulation. It could be that someone entering the tribulation should happen to listen to this message. That is an interesting possibility, is it not Here is the application: If you have the opportunity to get saved in the tribulation, make sure you are truly saved. If you show an interest in spiritual things, and the devil cannot drive that interest out of you, he will seek to lead you into a false path. And if he does, and you are not killed for what you say you believe, you will be one of the goats of this passage.

Third, let me make one application to us. I trust you are not offended if I say to you, make sure you are truly saved. 2 Peter 1:10 instructs us to make sure of both our calling and our election. We must make sure we are truly saved. If you have any doubts tell the Lord you are unsure, and then truly repent and believe in Him. And for those who will listen to this message, and you are not truly saved and you choose not to get saved, if you enter the tribulation your chances for

salvation are very slim. You will want to read 2 Thessalonians 2.

The third application and the second one to us, is that I believe that by the time this judgment comes, the Church has been with her Lord for seven years already. And she will help give out the judgment we have just considered. But I want to remind us that we too must stand in judgment someday, and there is one thing in common in this judgment with the one we will stand in.

You see, there are two types of judgment. I want you to notice that this judgment is not to see who is a sheep and who is a goat. That is clear by what they are. There is no judgment given in Scripture to determine whether we are saved or not, nor is this judgement in Matthew 25 given for that reason. The first type of judgment is to determine the rewards that have been earned or lost. Scripture says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Well, the judgment for the believer is for this purpose.

And at the judgment seat of Christ, where raptured Christians are judged, it will be to meet out rewards, or to indicate rewards lost, depending on the life lived by each believer. We see this type of judgment in Matthew 25:34 (read). In this kingdom, every believer will have privileges and responsibilities in direct proportion to how they lived their lives.

For the lost who have died, there is a judgment coming that is to determine how severe hell will be. And it will be severe in direct proportion to the things done while alive. Go to Luke 12 (read 42-48). One of the clear attributes of God is that He is just. That is why He rewards or punishes in direct proportion to each one's life.

So, we need to be reminded that all, including Christians, will meet the Lord in judgment.

CONCL: We have covered the last of the latter parables of Jesus. We have said that this parable is the sign of the end of the age. The old age is not quite closed after this judgment, but you can see it from here. But what has happened when this parable is over is that Jesus has come back down to earth with His bride. And when He reaches this earth amazing things happen. Listen to Zechariah 14:1-4, "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, And your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south."

Well, we have looked at only part of what will happen at the end of the tribulation when Jesus comes to earth. But I believe all those who do not profess to be Christians will be killed. The antichrist and the false prophet will be cast into hell alive. The devil will be cast into hell and be bound for 1,000 years. Old Testament saints will be resurrected. And now only professing Christians and true Christians are left on earth. These will now be gathered for judgment. They are separated on the basis of whether they are sheep or goats, or true Christians or professing Christians; nominal Christians. Now they are judged and rewarded on the basis of what they have done. The professing believers are cast into hell and the true Believer is left alone with Christ on earth. What a picture.

Listen to Luke 13:26-30. Jesus said, "Then one said to Him, 'Lord, are there few who are saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'"

I told you that the OT saints will be resurrected here. Listen now to the next verses, "There will be weeping and gnashing of

teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

So picture planet earth with me now, and how it will be when this judgment is over. There are no people in Canada or the United States, or in any other nation. All those who are left to begin the millennium are gathered there in Israel. And from there, this world will undergo a refurbishing! And I want to do one more message to show you where we have been and then I want to put this all together in its prophetic context.