

Text: Matt. 26:31-46 (NIV)

Theme: The King Bestows His Kingdom 1) upon believers 2) whose faith was evident from their deeds.

*Matthew 25:31-46*

<sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>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. <sup>33</sup>He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup>“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. <sup>35</sup>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, <sup>36</sup>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.’

<sup>37</sup>“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

<sup>40</sup>“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.’

<sup>41</sup>“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. <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>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.’

<sup>44</sup>“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?’

<sup>45</sup>“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.’

<sup>46</sup>“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

So far, in our series, “The Time in Between,” we looked ahead in week one to what might be called the “Time after Time Ends,” and saw what it will be like for the Saint’s Triumphant spending forever in heaven with Jesus. Then the last two weeks we stepped back into the “Time in Between” and focused on how we live and watch and wait in the meantime until the end comes. Now today, we narrow down our focus to one specific day—Judgment Day.

Even just hearing the word tends to bring a shiver up the spine, doesn’t it? After all it’s the day that each and every person will stand before the throne of the Maker of heaven and earth, the Ancient of Days, as the prophet Daniel called him. Daniel portrayed for us the awesome

sight—God sitting on his throne in his perfectly holy white robes, with his throne on fire and river of fire flowing out from it and thousands upon thousands of angels attending him. Then God takes his seat on his throne and the rest of the court is seated, and the books are opened containing all the evil deeds of sinners, just waiting to be read. The thought of that alone—having all our evil deeds listed off—is enough to make a person want to melt into the earth and have the mountains cover them. Then enters Jesus, the Son of Man, who approaches God on his throne and is given authority and glory and power to judge and rule over his kingdom forever. And make no mistake, he will judge righteously and permanently on the great and dreadful day, and that thought can cause us to shake in our boots.

But it's not supposed to, not for you, dear believer in Christ! I'll say it again. Judgement Day is not to be feared for the believer, and the New Creation inside of us longs for that day! For the unbeliever it most certainly is the most awful day they could face, followed by an eternity of equally agonizing and painful days, and so the Lord doesn't hold back from trying to terrify the wicked, and also the Old Adam inside us, with everything he's got in order to warn. The prophet Malachi tells us, **"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will see them on fire," says the Lord Almighty.**" But, and this is a very important "but" for believers! **"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves."** (Malachi 4:1,2) (See this happy little cow [picture]; he's prancing around, he's got no fear of anything.) That's the way God wants it to be for us, but because of our sinful natures, we still struggle during this time in between with our fear of Judgment Day.

And so, Jesus has just the thing for us in the words he was using to prepare his disciples for the end. It was on the Tuesday of Holy Week after Jesus left the temple where he had been confronting the teachers of the law. He had gone back to the Mount of Olives where the disciples came to him privately and asked him an important question, **"What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?"** (Matt. 24:2). In response, Jesus told them a whole series of prophecies and parables about the end times and Judgement Day. The Parable of the Ten Virgins with their lamps was one of them, as was the Parable of the Talents, which was last week's gospel lesson. The last section of this whole "Olivet discourse" (as it's sometimes called) is the Sheep and the Goats section, which isn't necessarily a parable, but a section filled with vivid imagery and metaphors nonetheless.

Now back to the question, “Why don’t believers need to fear Judgment Day?” The answer is our theme for today. It’s because Judgment Day is the day that *the King Bestows His Kingdom 1) upon believers, 2) whose faith was evident from their deeds.*

As Jesus starts out teaching his disciples in this section, he is point-blank claiming that he is that Son of Man talked about in Daniel chapter 7, who approaches the “Ancient of Days” and is given authority to judge. That’s the reason the Pharisees always got so mad when he called himself the Son of Man. It’s blasphemy unless you’re actually also the Son of God, which of course, he actually was. So Jesus tells his disciples how it’s going to be, **“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 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.” (Matt. 25:31-32).**

Now for all the times I’ve ever heard this Bible story, I don’t think I’ve ever known what the deal was about why sheep are separated from goats. Jesus doesn’t say why that is either, but it appears his disciples would have known what he was talking about and understood why. In consulting some Youtube videos and herders on the internet, it seems the reason is that while sheep and goats may be herded together just fine during the day, at night, when the shepherd brings them back to the sheep fold, the goats can be more aggressive and bothersome to sheep if they’re mingled together while the sheep just want to sit with each other and enjoy some shuteye. So the shepherd knows which ones are which and separates them out. Now to a boy from the city like me, it’s not that easy to figure out which are sheep, and which are goats, but the shepherd knows what to look for and what makes them different. That’s the basic point of comparison with the way Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, believers from unbelievers, on Judgment Day. He knows which are which and how to arrange them. For Jesus had once told the Jewish leaders, **“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24).** So believers will be put on the right and unbelievers on the left.

**“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.’” (Matt 25:34).** Dear believer in Christ, those are the happiest and most blessed words that will ever be spoken to you, and they will be spoken to you on Judgement Day. That’s why you not only don’t need to fear the day, but why you have every reason to look forward to it. With those words, the King bestows his kingdom upon you forever! It’s the fulfillment of the

promise made in our adoption at baptism that guaranteed us an inheritance as children of God, and now Jesus says, “Come and take it!” It’s yours! It’s what God prepared for you and every believer when he chose you from before creation of the world!

Now what Jesus says next might come as a surprise. Right after giving the kingdom, he points to the *deeds* they have done, **“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. 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.” (Matt. 25:35,36)**

Now some ears might hear that and think, “Well, I guess that’s what I gotta do to get to heaven. I gotta do good deeds for the needy and then God will let me in.” Maybe other ears hear what Jesus said and think, “Wait a second, Jesus, I thought **‘it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.’**” (Ephesians 2:8,9). Why are you talking about their deeds like it’s the reason for him giving them the kingdom?” That’s a good question to ask because it helps us to distinguish something important. Their good deeds are not earning them the kingdom. The Bible is clear about that all over the place. You know what Jesus said in John 3:16, **“Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** You just heard a moment ago what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8,9 and again he says in Romans 3:20 where it says, **“No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law;”** and in Titus 3:4,5 **“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that have been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”** Those are the causes of us receiving an inheritance-- God’s kindness, love, mercy, and grace imparted to us through his word and in the washing of baptism.

What Jesus is doing is pointing to the proof of them being believers, which are the deeds they have done as fruits and evidence of their faith. He’s telling us what to look for to tell them apart from the outside, since we can’t see what their hearts look like on the inside. It’s kind of like the fact that sheep and goats are actually different species entirely. But unless you have a microscope to look at their DNA, somebody will have to tell you what to look for on the outside—what’s different about their ears and wool coats and horns and tails. So Jesus points out

the things that believers do in faith for the least of people and for Christ, and Jesus points out the things that unbelievers don't do because they have no faith.

So Jesus is here also confirming what he and the inspired Scriptures say in many places as well—that faith naturally displays itself in good deeds. **“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5).** Or **“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35).** Or James says, **“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead...I will show you my faith by my deeds”**

Now is this what we are supposed to rely on? If someone asked us, “How come you're not afraid of Judgement Day?” would we say, “Cause I got all these good deeds I'm sure God will be quite happy with.” No, absolutely not! To rely on our deeds is to fall away from grace! Remember in the metaphor how the sheep on the right don't even remember what deeds Jesus is talking about? They say, **“Lord, when did [we do these deeds]”**. And it's Jesus who tells them. It's not the righteous who point at their own deeds, but it's Jesus who remembers even the smallest and simplest of their deeds done in faith for the least of people and he reckons them righteous on account of his grace.

Now let me try to bring this all together. If we return to our theme for a moment—the King will bestow his kingdom 1) on believers 2) whose faith was evident from their deeds. Do you see how it would be a mistake to come away from today simply thinking, “Well, pastor told me to make sure I'm doing my good deeds so I'm saved with the sheep on Judgment Day.” That won't get you into heaven and it won't take away any fear. Let your takeaway once again be Jesus, your beloved king who has died to make you his own and given you his word. He's brought you to believe that word, and in believing, you have crossed over from death to life. This is how your name has come to be written in his book of life. For believers whose names are written in that book, there will be no condemnation, no judgement, no evil deeds read from the books that were opened, and nothing to fear. Instead, the Lord will remember the good deeds you have done in his name and he will commend you for them! Until that day, remain in Jesus the Vine, and in his Father the Gardener, who will make you even more fruitful, and by your fruitful deeds, all people will know that you are disciples of Jesus. To his glory! Amen.

**<sup>27</sup> Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second**

**time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:27,28 Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.**