

## **“Which Side Are You On?”**

11-23-14

This part of Matthew 25 can be one of the most disturbing texts in Scripture. It leaves us wondering, “What side am I on?” Am I one of the sheep or one of the goats? In this section, Jesus talks about what will happen when the world as we know it, ends. He speaks about a coming judgment – a judgment where the eternity of all people will be determined.

It’s a time when all that we value: possessions, job, home, paycheck, fast-track career paths – won’t mean anything. The only thing that will matter is, will you be on Jesus’ left – a goat? Or will you be on Jesus’ right – a sheep? Which side are you on?

Open to Matthew 25. There are so many thoughts and ideas on what the Last Day will look like. The movies show us St. Peter standing at the gate with a large book that has everybody listed and he’s checking to see if you’re in the heaven book or not. Then there’s the idea that Jesus is going to talk to each of us individually and go through every action and work one-by-one, and at the end, it’s either heaven or hell for eternity!

Let’s see exactly what Matthew says is going to happen and how. Verses 31-33, *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.”*

As these verses say, it’s the end! Everyone is there! All nations will appear before Jesus Christ on His throne. The first thing Jesus will do is a separation of the people left and right. He will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Notice, each group is being separated for what they are. He divides them as He sees them. Sheep on His right hand or His hand of mercy, and the goats on His left hand, His hand of judgment.

You would think that after the separation, He would immediately tell why He separated them this way, but Jesus has some words for those on His right first. Look at verse 34, *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”* Jesus gives those on His right a Blessing and Inheritance. Jesus knows each one of us now and He’s known us from the beginning of time! As we come to be baptized, He reminds us that He has called us by name and we are His.

Then, Jesus goes on to say on what basis the division was made. He tells of the works of righteous first. Verses 35-40, *“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”*

But the Bible teaches that people can’t earn their way to heaven. *“By grace through faith,”* is how salvation comes. Even the sheep were surprised at Jesus’ words. They asked Him, *“Lord, when did we do these things for You?”* They weren’t even aware that their acts of kindness honored Jesus. They didn’t know that their faith measured up!

The key to this is in verse 34. Jesus said to these folks, *“Come you who are blessed by my Father.”* The sheep inherit the Kingdom not because of what they’ve done. They no more deserved the Kingdom than did the goats on Jesus’ left. None of us do! But because of righteousness and faith, we are blessed by the Father, heaven is theirs.

God offered forgiveness and salvation and saving faith grasped it! And from this blessing and Holy Spirit filling - the good deeds follow. These acts of charity and kindness become the prime evidence that they have saving faith.

But for those on the left, it's a totally different story. Verses 41-46, *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, '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?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

For those on the left, there is a Curse and Hell! They haven't walked with Jesus, and they've lived a life of self-centeredness and lack of care for others. Because of this, He curses them to eternal separation from His presence. And that's exactly what Hell is!

Open to James 2. At the final judgment on the last day, the eternal divide is between the faithful and the faithless. Verses 14-17, *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."*

Being kind, and doing good works, doesn't require superhuman strength, just faith in Jesus. Doing good isn't a burden or something that the faithful get sick and tired of doing. They don't quit because they don't get honored or get their way. They don't get bored of being kind, they just keep on serving! This happens because they don't do the works out of selfish ambition, it's Christ in them! It's Christ's love that drives them! It's Christ that fills them!

And so, in the end, Jesus will tell them, *"My death on the cross was for you. My resurrection is yours. My Father has blessed you by giving you the faith to grasp it through His Word, and the Holy Spirit has changed you into a person filled with faith to serve Me and those around you! You are truly blessed and you are Mine forever!"*