

The **Judge** is my **Shepherd** ... *I shall not fear*

Matthew 25:31-46

Pastor Jim Rademaker

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." (Matthew 26)

His time had come. In only a few days, Jesus will hang from a Roman cross. Good Shepherd Jesus is preparing His sheep, His followers, His brothers, for what's to come. Not only will He be mistreated and killed, they too, would be in danger. As he would soon tell them, *"A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* (Jn 15)

They, and those who would follow, will be persecuted, run out of town, lose everything, go without food, without extra clothing and other provisions. They will go through times of hungry and thirst; forced from friends and family, strangers, mistreated, sick, thrown in prison. How will they endure? How will they make it? How will we?

Jesus gives His followers, His sheep, His brothers and sisters, an *eternal* perspective on all they will face. The big picture that will put their suffering in perspective; that will give them hope in the midst of the seemingly hopeless. A Judgment is coming that will one day put all things right. When it seems things are out of control and like nobody's in charge, Jesus sets things straight.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Judgment Day is coming. And Jesus will be on His throne in all His glory! And gathered before His throne of judgment will be everyone who's ever lived. And His judgment will be simple. Everyone will be divided into two groups; one on His right, the other on His left. Those on His right will inherit a glorious kingdom, prepared for them from before the beginning of time itself. Those on His left will be cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Eternal life or eternal punishment. That's what awaits us all.

The question is "Who goes where?" Right now, where is everybody? How are they separated? They're not. Everybody's mixed up together. Believers and unbelievers grazing together under the reign of Good Shepherd Jesus, who shepherds the world from God's right hand. All get treated alike. Believers get the same rain and sunshine as do unbelievers. They get the same colds and flus, clogged arteries and cancers. They have the same business problems, car problems, and house problems. They both die. And they both rise in the resurrection on the Last Day. But that's where the similarities end and the differences begin. The righteous rise to eternal life. Unbelievers to eternal condemnation. Sheep on the right, goats on the left. And *Jesus* is the dividing line between them.

At the end of the day, as the sun is setting, the shepherd sorts the sheep and the goats into their respective pens. Sheep to the honorable right; goats to the dishonorable left. Why the separation? What's the criteria for putting some on the right and others on the left? Where some "good" sheep and others "bad" sheep? No. It's not because of how good or how bad they were. It's not because of what they *did* or *didn't* do. It's because of what they *are*. What they did or didn't do merely *reflects* what they *are*. (William Cwirla)

The difference between "sheep" and "goat" is the difference between faith and unbelief. Either *for* Jesus or *against* Jesus. Either living by *faith*, trusting in Him as your Savior from sin, or living in *unbelief*, trusting in yourself. Either accepting the Gospel and His followers and their message or rejecting Jesus and His followers.

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. 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.' ... "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." *"The least of these my brothers."* Who is Jesus referring to? Who are the least of these His brothers? What first comes to our minds is the poor, the less fortunate, the down and out. But what did Jesus say?

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends out His disciples. *As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*

... "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves ... Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. ... "Whoever receives you receives me ... And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Matthew 12 But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 18 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ... "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

John 13 Just two days following our text, Jesus, in the upper room with His least, His disciples, hours before his crucifixion, says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me ..."

What did Jesus say to the one who was persecuting Christians, and was on the road to Damascus to continue persecuting even more? "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9)

Now you are the body of Christ ... (1 Cor 12:27)

"... as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. ... as you did not do it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did not do it to me."

Although loving our neighbor, especially those in special need, is certainly not excluded, in the context of Jesus' teachings, this final teaching addresses not serving people in general, but receiving the gospel's messengers. How people treat Jesus' followers, is a reflection of how they treat Jesus, how they respond to the good news of salvation in Christ. As the missionaries from Matthew's churches spread the good news of the kingdom, they faced both hostility and warm welcome. The same thing continues to happen today.

"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." What's the *criteria* for who's on the right and who's on the left? The nations will be judged according to *faith*, according to how they *respond* to Jesus, to the gospel, to His messengers. One treats Jesus, as one treats his representatives, his ambassadors, who should be received with hospitality, food and drink.

The King thus judges the nations based on how they respond to the gospel of the kingdom preached to them; believing it or rejecting it. And there's an intimate connection between God's messengers, His God's child, and God Himself. When you receive one, you receive the other. When you reject one, you reject the other.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. ... And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23) For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. (Psalm 95:7) I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. ... The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (John 10)

You get the picture. These are important verses to keep in mind when you hear the words of Jesus about the sheep and the goats and the final judgment. That same Good Shepherd throughout all the Scriptures is the Shepherd you will meet on the Last Day. The same one who laid down His life for you, sought you out, cared for you, provided for you, protected you, and rescued you, all through your life now, will do so on the Last Day. His sheep, those who belong to Him, who recognize His voice and follow Him - on His right. Those who aren't His sheep, who don't recognize His voice and don't follow Him - on His left.

The separation, and *then* comes the evidence. Did you notice that? The evidence comes *after* the separation, not before. It is *not* the *basis* for the separation. It *can't* be. For Scripture also says what? By ... grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So, you're *not* a sheep because of what *you* did. You're a sheep, because of what Jesus did for you. And *then*, what you *do*, comes from what? From *faith*. For Scripture tells us: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is what? ... dead.* (James 2:17)

So on the Last Day, Jesus points out to the whole world, the *works* you did as *evidence* of a *faith* - living and active. Works done not to *earn* forgiveness, but because you *are* forgiven. And most of them, you won't even remember doing. With eyes on Jesus, you did them for the One who did everything for you.

As the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians: *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.* (1 Cor 15:22)

And so will the Scriptures be fulfilled on that Last Day, with (as Ezekiel wrote) the promised Son of David on the throne forever. Your Shepherd on the throne. The Judge is my Shepherd ... I shall not fear His coming, but rejoice! (James Douthwaite)

Those who follow Jesus will be persecuted, even run out of town, (like some in places like North Korea) lose everything, go without food and water, without extra clothing, and other provisions. They will go through times of hungry and thirst; forced from friends and family, strangers, mistreated, sick, thrown in prison. How will they endure? How will they make it? How will we?

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. ... it was kind of you to share my trouble. ... Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. (Philippians 4:10)

... And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

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. Those on His left will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.