

Sermon November 22, 2020 Last Sunday of the Church Year Matthew 25:31-46

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today is the last Sunday of the Church Year. We round things out with this fairly well-known section from the Gospel of Matthew. In Jesus' final discourse on the end of days, he has been giving us some examples of what the end will be like. We had a parable of 10 virgins with and without lamp oil. Then Jesus told about slaves of a master entrusted with his wealth. Today, we finish up as we come to a teaching of Jesus where he gives us insight into the nature of what is in people's hearts at the final judgement.

In this teaching the people are only separated into two groups. The group on Jesus' right are the sheep. Those on his left are the goats. Jesus is using an illustration that would be familiar to the people of his day. Both types of animals were raised in that area. Sometimes they would pasture together. At the end of the day the sheep and the goats would be separated before they were penned. Thus we get the illustration of the final judgement. The point is obviously not that some people look like sheep and others like goats. The point is they are quite different from each other.

The difference here lies specifically in how these people being judged have treated other people. To be even more precise, Jesus' interest is in how they treated his *brothers*.

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." Matthew 25:37-40

The sheep on Jesus' right had lent aid to and helped Jesus' brothers. They fed them, clothed them, welcomed them with kindness, and visited them when they were sick or in trouble. The goats lent no such aid and provided no such help. It's easy to understand that part. However, who are Jesus' brothers? The church has answered that question in different ways. Historically Jesus' brothers have been identified with his first disciples and then all who preached and evangelized with the gospel of salvation and eternal life. More recently Jesus' brothers have been identified with all who are believers. Others incorrectly identify Jesus with *anyone* who is poor, oppressed, and the like, and have built entire missions of mercy to the poor upon that idea (hospitals, soup kitchens, food pantries, etc.) Jesus never equates his identity with the poor in general. One can argue he identifies himself with all those of faith, but Jesus never specifically makes that connection in his teaching. He repeatedly and consistently names his disciples as his brothers.

This all does make sense when you think about it. Who is saved? We know the answer to that question. *Everyone who calls upon the Lord will be saved.* Romans 10:13 No one is saved because they help those in need. They are saved because they believe the word spoken to them

by evangelists, pastors, and teachers. If they believe their word, then they will also no doubt treat them kindly with supply and support, as is so often the case. The help believers give is the external evidence of the saving faith that dwells within.

This is a good reading to close out the church year. It makes us evaluate our faith and our life and perhaps reconsider the way we have arranged it. It is also a wonderful text because we see Jesus coming out on top. He was not feed, clothed, sheltered, and supported by all who heard him teach. Instead, he was arrested, food was withheld, he was beaten, flogged, crowned with thorns, stripped naked and nailed to a cross. In his death, he took the judgement and paid the price for all the mistreatment and hatred of the world. As we look to Jesus, our shortcomings are not counted against us. God considers us as perfect as his son, Jesus. We are promised his presence among us here below and a place with him in his kingdom yet to come. So today we see Jesus, the savior of the world, in his proper light:

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, ... Matthew 25:31-32

A throne, angels, Jesus in his glory ... what a sight! This is how we close out the church year. We close it with Jesus at the top of his game. He is in control, with everything subject to him, seated on his throne, with all angels doing his bidding. This is Jesus. Our Jesus. Our Savior. Our king. Our brother. God bless you in him now and forever! Amen.

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