

## THE BLESSING OF BEING A BLESSING

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**Text: Matthew 25:31-46, NKJV**

<sup>31</sup> “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. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> 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: <sup>35</sup> 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; <sup>36</sup> I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? <sup>39</sup> Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’

<sup>41</sup> “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

<sup>44</sup> “Then they also will answer <sup>1</sup>Him, 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?’ <sup>45</sup> Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

### INTRODUCTION

I don't want to burst anyone's bubble, but the reality is that not everyone who walks through the doors of a church is a disciple any more than walking into a garage makes you a mechanic. I remember speaking to a man who told me he had been pastoring for five years before he received Christ into his heart. He was religious and he was active in ministry,

preaching from the Scriptures every Sunday for five years, but he said that one day in his study with the Word of God in front of him, he was confronted by the fact that he had never actually surrendered his life to Christ. In that moment, with the Holy Spirit stirring his heart to make a true commitment, he said he received Jesus as his personal Savior, and it changed his world. The same kind of thing happens to people in the pews; some are faithful to the church, but they've never surrendered their life to Christ.

The Bible uses various metaphors to illustrate this truth by speaking of wheat and tares growing together in the same field; foolish and wise virgins in the same room waiting for the groom; and in our text, sheep and goats from the same field. In these examples, it is not readily apparent which is wheat and which are tares, or who has oil in their lamp and who does not, or which animals are sheep and which are goats.

To the untrained eye, when the wheat and the tares begin to grow, they look almost identical. Jesus said this is like the kingdom of heaven. It's difficult to tell the difference, and if we go out trying to pull up all the tares, we are likely to end up pulling up wheat as well. So, the farmer in the parable said, in Matthew 13:30, "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" Meaning that while we cannot always tell who is really a sheep, and who is a wolf in sheep's clothing, God knows and there be a day of reckoning.

In the parable of the ten virgins (found at the beginning Matthew chapter 25), all ten seemed to be prepared for the bridegroom's arrival. They all had the wicks for the lamps trimmed, and it looked like all ten were ready. But what you could not see in the clay lamps, was that only five of the ten virgins had oil in their lamps, and at the midnight cry, which announced the coming groom, the empty lamps were exposed because the five foolish virgins had no oil to keep their lamps burning when the bridegroom came. The five wise virgins were invited into the bridegroom's chambers, but the door was shut to the five foolish virgins. When Jesus comes, the ones who are ready will be received into His presence, and those who are not ready for His return will find the door closed.

In our text, there are sheep and goats, which from a distance look very similar to the untrained eye. But when the shepherd calls them, he knows the difference, and he will separate the sheep from the goats. Jesus tells us that "when the Son of Man comes in His glory to sit on the throne of glory," and He will separate sheep from goats.

Scriptures reveals that there will almost always be a mixture of sincere and insincere people calling themselves "believers" in any congregation. The brutal fact is that the heart is

deceitful and we can even fool ourselves, but God says in Jeremiah 17:10, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind. Even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." There are many things we can fake and feign - we can have a good handshake, put on a big smile, wear the right clothes, and say the right things - but Jesus said we will be known by the fruit we bear. We are not saved by what we *do*, but if our faith is real, if our commitment to Christ is genuine, then what we *do* reveals where our heart and where our faith really is.

The apostle Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Who we really are is not just revealed by what we say, but it is also revealed by what we do and how we treat one another in the body of Christ. Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Even people on the outside should be able to hear and see that we love one another and know that our faith is real, because we cannot love God whom we have not seen, if we cannot love our brother or sister whom we have seen (1 Jn. 4:20).

Jesus puts this illustration of the sheep and the goats in the context of His teaching and parables concerning the end of the age. In chapter 24, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, He warns the disciples of the terrible times that will come, times of great tribulation when believers will be killed. But He said that when we see those days, we will know that His coming is at the door. It will be as it was in the days of Noah as wickedness abounds, but He said "be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:44). What follows are the parables of final reckoning - the ten virgins, the faithful and the unfaithful servants, the sheep and the goats.

In the previous passage, Jesus gives the parable of faithful and unfaithful servants. The faithful servants use the resources the master gave them for the master's good, but the lazy and evil servant does nothing with what he was given. To the faithful servants the master says, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." But concerning the fate of the unfaithful servant the master says, "cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The passage we read today is sometimes called a parable, but it isn't a parable in the narrow sense of the word. Instead, it is more teaching picking up on the theme of the last days. This teaching starts in Matthew 24:3 when the disciples question Jesus about the end of the age, and His teaching culminates with this passage in chapter 25. It starts with predictions concerning the way the world will treat believers, and it ends with the world

being judged by the way they treat believers. Look at the text with me.

### **THE SON OF MAN**

Our passage, beginning at verse 31, opens with Jesus speaking of His return. He hasn't left the disciples yet, though He has spoken of His impending death on more than one occasion. Jesus refers to himself as "the Son of Man," which comes from Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 and 14, which state,

<sup>13</sup> I was watching in the night visions,

And behold, One like the Son of Man,

Coming with the clouds of heaven!

He came to the Ancient of Days,

And they brought Him near before Him.

<sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,

That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion,

Which shall not pass away,

And His kingdom the one

Which shall not be destroyed.

By referring to Himself as "the Son of Man," Jesus is embracing the prophecy of Daniel concerning the Son of Man. Jesus says, "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." Jesus came as a baby meek and mild the first time, but when He comes again, He will come in all of His glory and every eye shall see Him and know that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, seated upon His throne accompanied by the host of heaven.

On that day, "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." Typically, the sheep and the

goats were allowed to graze together in the same field, but at night the sheep prefer to be outside in the sheepfold, while the goats with prefer a shelter for warmth.

At this point the sheep and the goats are separated, and Jesus said this illustrates what will happen to the nations at the final judgment. Who are the nations that are gathered to the throne of the Son of Man? The Greek word is *ethne*, which is sometimes used to designate Gentiles, but here Jesus says *pante ta ethne*, or “all the nations,” and there is no indication that Judah is excluded from this gathering. This is all the nations upon the earth, meaning everyone alive at His second coming. These nations represent the people on the earth that are living when Jesus returns at the end of what He called, “great tribulation.”

According to the apostle Paul the dead in Christ, along with the righteous saints, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:16). Likewise, the dead saints of the Old Covenant were also been ushered into the presence of God when He Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth and led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8). But at the end of the tribulation period, when Jesus physically returns to earth to put His feet upon the Mount of Olives, the nations of the earth, the people who are still alive after the tribulation period when He returns, will also be judged.

Of the people remaining upon the earth, there will be those deemed worthy of reward and eternal life, who are referred to as the sheep - also called the righteous and the blessed - which will be positioned in a place of honor and reward on His right hand. Then there will be another group, referred to as the goats, and they will be positioned on His left hand, which is the place of dishonor and judgment. What are the criteria by which the sincerity of their faith is revealed? Look at verse 34.

### **THE SHEEP**

To the sheep, who are on the right hand, the King will say,

<sup>34</sup> Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <sup>35</sup> 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; <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.”

The King, that is Jesus, uses the first-person pronoun in reference to the way these nations treated Him. There is a principle in the New Testament, which indicates that the way we treat the servants of Jesus Christ, is the way we treat Jesus Himself. Let me give you an example of this from Acts chapter 3.

Saul (who would later be known as apostle Paul), was on his way to persecute the believers. He had been throwing them in jail and even having some put to death for their faith in Jesus, which he viewed as heresy. Acts chapter 3 says Saul was on his way to Damascus when a bright light shone and Saul fell to the ground. While he was on the ground, he heard a voice saying,

<sup>4</sup> “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

<sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

Physically and literally Saul was persecuting the believers, but Jesus took it personally. The church is the Bride of Christ, also called the Body of Christ; therefore, anytime someone acts violently against the church it is as though they are coming against Christ Himself. Likewise, anytime someone blesses the Body of Christ, they are blessing Christ. You don't mess with God's anointed, and the people of God are His anointed.

The sheep, the people on the right hand of God, are revealed by how they treated Jesus. It's interesting that they were surprised that they were being rewarded for doing what they did. They weren't doing it for reward, they did it because they *are* righteous, and this is what the righteous do. Verse 37 says,

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? <sup>39</sup> Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

They weren't doing what they did to prove anything, but what they did proved that they were righteous. You will know them by the fruit that they bear. The apple tree doesn't say, “I'm going to produce apples to prove that I'm an apple tree.” That's just what healthy and productive apples trees do . . . they make apples. The sheep are shocked to learn they have done these things for the King, and they asked, “When? When did we do these things to You?”

Notice that these aren't grandiose gestures. These are relatively simple acts - providing food, drink, clothing, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. This isn't an exhaustive list of the things the righteous do, but it is illustrative of the kinds of things the righteous do. These are acts of mercy and well within the range of possible actions any believer can do to bless

others.

They don't deny doing these things, but they are curious as to when they had done any of these things for the King. He answers, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me." What does that mean? Does it mean that we can work our way into heaven? Does that negate the teaching that we are saved by grace through faith and not of works, lest any man boast (Eph. 2:8)?

No. However, these acts of mercy and charity are the return on God's investment of love in the lives of believers. These examples of love in action are the fruit that is produced in the lives of true believers. These things don't save them, but they do these things because they are saved, they are following Christ, they are allowing the love of Christ which has been shed abroad in their heart by the Holy Spirit, to overflow into the lives of others.

So far so good. Most of us have probably heard this taught many times. The sheep, the people on the right hand, the righteous, the blessed, are those who have done these good deeds, revealing that they are true believers. They are the wheat in the field, they are the wise virgins with oil in their lamps, they are the faithful stewards, and they are the sheep on the right hand of the Son of Man.

However, let's consider a question that scholars have wrestled with for the past two-thousand years: Who are the ones upon which these good works have been bestowed? In other words, who are the sheep blessing, who are they giving food, and drink, and clothes, and who are they visiting? Does this refer to all marginalized people everywhere, regardless of their faith or commitment to Christ? Is that what the King says here? Look at it again. Verse 40 says, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me." Jesus qualifies who the recipients of these good works are. He specifically says they have done it, "to the least of these My brethren." That word, "brethren," from the Greek *adelphos*, is primarily used in the New Testament to refer to the followers of Jesus. In Mark 3:35, Jesus said, ". . . whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

Jesus does not appear to be referring to the marginalized in general, or the poor in general, or the outcasts in general. Other places in the Bible certainly teach us to show love and charity to everyone, but in this particular passage, Jesus qualifies who these acts of mercy and charity are bestowed upon. Who is He referring to? He's referring to "my brethren." Which He defines in Mark's Gospel as "those who do the will of His Father." These are His followers, the believers, which we call, the church. Therefore, it appears that the nations will be judged by how they treat the church. In the New Covenant, the nations are judged by

how they treat believers, which are Jews and Gentiles, from all peoples, nations, and languages who worship Jesus Christ and follow His teaching.

This principle goes back in the book of Matthew to chapter 10, where Jesus sent disciples into the towns and villages to preach that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus said in verse 40, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." And then in chapter 24, Jesus speaks of the end of the age, teaching about the way the world will treat believers. He says, beginning at verse

<sup>9</sup> "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. <sup>11</sup> Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end shall be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

In our text Jesus is saying that the fruit of our faith is revealed in how we treat one another. The apostle Paul said it like this to the Galatians believers in chapter 6, verse 10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, **especially** to those who are of the household of faith."

We should extend a hand of love to all people, because by doing we become salt and light, but Paul adds, "**especially** those of the household of faith." Sometimes we see the homeless or the poor in our communities and we are touched with compassion. That's good, that commendable, but what about those of the household of faith? What about our brothers and sisters in Christ serving God in desperate conditions in locations far from the comforts of home? The missionaries serving in hard places with little compassion or love from the culture around them, and who sometimes feel they are forgotten by the family of faith? What about the pastors serving in Muslim countries, doing so at great peril to their own life, living under the daily threat of being imprisoned for their faith? Where is the church? This is why the ministry of someone like Hong Yang is so important. He reminds us of, and shows us, the sacrifices being made by pastors and believers in China who are facing increasing persecution from the government, but who are winning souls to the Lord by thousands as they worship in caves and fields.

Furthermore, as Jesus, the apostle Paul, and apostle John all reveal, persecution is coming, and this will include the church in America. Already the dark clouds are hovering over the horizon as people certain entities in the West push to silence the church so that they can promote an immoral agenda, arguing that any sexual preference or act is permissible as



long as it feels good. Persecution is coming and those who are blessing the people of God, those who are blessing the least of these brethren of Jesus, are revealing their true colors and their faith in Christ. Again, we don't do these things to be saved or to get rewarded by the King; we do these things because we are saved and we love the King.

## THE GOATS

Well if the blessing is there for those who bless the believers, then what about the people who do not and will not bless the people of God? The King answers that question as well, beginning at verse 41,

<sup>41</sup> "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

They will of course protest, asking, "When did we fail to provide these things for you?" And He will say, "Inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me." Jesus does not add the words "My brethren" here, but it is implied from the previous statement to the sheep. The "least of these" are His "brethren." Therefore, nations, people, governments, systems and institutions that persecute the church will find themselves facing an eternity of punishment. In verse 46 Jesus says, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment," They will be "cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

However, note that there is no sin of commission mentioned, they are not accused of actually attacking the church, but there is a sin of omission, in that they did nothing to help the church when the church came under persecution. Standing by silently while the least of these are being persecuted, is essentially giving tacit approval for the persecution to occur. Where was the church in Germany when Hitler was persecuting the Jewish people? The church, for the most part was silent, and in their silence, they allowed the persecution to occur. As such, they were as complicit as Hitler in these evil acts against humanity.

There's going to be a payday someday. Back in chapter 10, Jesus said to His disciples going into the town and villages with the message of the kingdom,

<sup>14</sup> And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. <sup>15</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!

Like Noah and his family before they entered the ark, the church - the remnant, the faithful few who have now bowed a knee to Baal - is the only thing keeping the final judgment of God from falling upon a wicked world, but judgment is coming. Those on the left hand will be judged and sent into everlasting punishment, but the righteous will enter eternal life. The righteous will receive a crown of life, and will hear the King say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

### **CONCLUSION**

The takeaway from this message, is that if you are believer then you are God's masterpiece, you are the apple of His eye, you are the object of His affection, you are the love of His life, you are the Bride of Christ, and the Body of Christ, and when anyone comes against you, they are coming against His Son.

His Son already died once and for all, and He will not die again. He will not come as baby in manger again, He will not be beaten and humiliated again, but when He does come again, He is coming as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is not coming on the fowl of a donkey, but He is coming riding on a white horse with ten-thousands of His saints and with the host of heaven by His side. He is coming in power and glory with fire in His eyes and sword in His hand, and anyone who has offended one of these little ones, will be judged. Anyone who has actively or passively put their hand against His church will pay.

You need to know that God's got your back, and He will never leave you nor forsake you. Walk boldly into the field of battle following the Captain of our salvation. We will be persecuted, we will be opposed, but woe to him by whom offenses come, because one day the righteous will shine like the sun, and the wicked will be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Yes, in the world there will be tribulation, but be of good cheer, He has overcome the world, and these present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.

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