

Nov. 22, 2020

Grace mercy and peace to you from God, the Father of us, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text for this LAST SUNDAY in the Church Year is from the last 15 verses of Matthew 25, the Parable of **The Sheep and the Goats**.

I want to use the approach we take for 30 Minute Church -- a half-hour worship service, where our worship is focused on a discussion around God's Word, specifically a Bible story like this parable. One of the ways we approach the story is to read it and retell it in our own words. Or sometimes we try and say what the story is about in as few words as possible in order to get down to the NUT of what God is saying to us through his word. What is the story ABOUT?

So this first time through, the story I'm going to try and get to the facts. Just the facts...

"When the Son of Man (JESUS) 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. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his 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.

AND "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. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Now I deliberately left out the interesting stuff and focused only on the action. The Son of Man, JESUS, the Second Person of the Trinity, the NAME by which Jesus reveals his divinity, will take the throne in all his glory. Judgement DAY will be LIKE a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep of his right hand, his blessed ones, will take their inheritance prepared for them, the kingdom of God. Then He will say to the goats on his left hand "depart, you cursed ones"... into the eternal fire prepared not for you but for the devil and his messengers. WHY?

We might never know the answer to that question but in this case God provides us with these little tid-bits.

To Those on the RIGHT:

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.'... In other words... YOU who SERVED ME: Enter into you eternal reward.

To Those on the LEFT:

... WHY SHALL YOU ENTER INTO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT?

Because I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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.'... YOU DID NOT SERVE ME.

At 30 Minute Church, we invite our membership to ponder on what they have just read, and wonder at it. We are allowed to wonder and let our minds wander down the paths of learning. What is curious in this story is THE REASONING BEHIND THE JUSTIFICATION that the Lord gives to US.

The righteous SEEMED SURPRISED, SHOCKED... "they answered Him saying... 'Lord, (WHEN?) did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'...

NOTICE: THEY EARN PUBLIC PRAISE FOR WHAT THEY DID.

THEY SEEM SURPRISED TO LEARN THIS IS WHAT THEY DID.

That that had done ANYTHING? Perhaps not. The surprise seems to be that their efforts served JESUS directly. Of course they served their brothers and sister... But Jesus credits this as service done to HIM.

REPLY: "The King will say... 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'... [God's people]

BUT THOSE on the LEFT will say...

"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?"

THEY HAVE EARNED PUBLIC CONDEMNATION FOR WHAT THE DID **NOT** DO.

And THEY SEEM SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT THEY **DIDN'T** DO THESE THINGS.

(IMPLIED: "Certainly, we would have done these things, had we seen it was YOU in need... BUT... Why would YOU EVER be in need?")

Does this mean that those on his left NEVER did ANY good works? Acts of mercy or kindness? I would suppose they did, but that they were NOT the kinds of service that Jesus would credit as being done in service to HIM.

You can be a nice guy... and still not enter into heaven. The key to heaven is FAITH. I hate to say this, but I expect that there will be a lot of NICE guys and gals who will depart into the darkness. Salvation is by faith.

REPLY: "He will say, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, [My People] you did not do for me.'... [because you are not of my people]"

You could walk away from this with the impression that we are saved by our good works. But that would overlook the fact that those on the left are surprised. They do not admit that they didn't do any good works. They seem to think that they did. They are surprised that their works were not recognized. Likewise the righteous are surprised that they did ANY works of merit. Neither of these seems to be standing on their merits, what they earned. One group being surprised that they earned anything. The other being surprised that didn't earn a thing... a missed opportunity... "we didn't know..."

That is because the works being praised are the fruits of faith.

Here is proof that you are a believer: Faith without works is dead. Living faith produces fruits... and you will be surprised to learn what you have done in the Lord's service one day, as I am sure that I will also. ("My Lord. I did that? I never knew.")

What I would take away from this story of judgement is not grounded in fear that I haven't done enough. I will let those who scoff at our faith take surprise at what they didn't do. And suffer the consequences. For the believer I think this apocalyptic story has comfort to offer us -- being that we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Being gathered on the right, the side of justice, the side of vindication, we enter into his glory to take our inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. And we will learn of all the things we did right, as well as all the things we didn't do right. But the power of forgiveness will set us free to enter into his kingdom, the celebration of the Bride (the church) and groom (Christ) which will have no end.

As I hear this message, and I look out upon the world and the chaos and the anger, bitterness and hatred. I'm disposed to pity the foolish who turn their hearts from such a wonderful promise as we have. Knowing their fate makes it somewhat easier to treat them with kindness and patience, for what awaits them is ugliness. It makes me inclined to pray for them and treat them with generosity. **It should also make me desire to share the lifeline of the Gospel that they might turn and join us in the way of truth.** To do all those things the servant of God is called upon to do. Even in these last days.
AMEN