

FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE

Matthew 25:31-46

Key Verse: 25:40

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

This is the third and final parable in Matthew 25 in which Jesus tells us how to prepare for his Second Coming. It is one of the clearest pictures in all of Scripture of Jesus’ coming again. Jesus will come in power and great glory as the King and Judge. At that time, there will be two kinds of people: the blessed and the cursed. The blessed inherit the kingdom of heaven. The cursed depart into eternal punishment. Let’s learn how to be among the blessed when Jesus comes again.

First, the Son of Man comes in his glory (31-33).

Look at verse 31. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.” Jesus’ Second Coming will be glorious. It is a great contrast to his first coming. The first time he came, Jesus was born of the virgin Mary and became a little baby in a manger. He grew from infancy to adulthood, being fully human. He became like us in every way to be our Friend and Shepherd. When the temperature became cool, he shivered. When he was hungry, his stomach growled. When he worked hard, he became tired. His human flesh veiled his heavenly glory as God. In his vulnerable state, sinners despised and rejected him.

However, when Jesus comes again, he comes “in his glory” as the Son of God. His appearance will be dazzling. He will be shining like the sun in all its brilliance. Moreover, his authority will be acknowledged by all creatures in heaven and on earth. At one word of his mouth all the forces of evil will be destroyed. At one word of his mouth all who are in their graves will come out and stand before him to be judged. This glorious Jesus will be accompanied by the angels of heaven, thousands and thousands of them, each one mightier than a nation’s army. To be sure, Jesus comes as a victorious king and a righteous judge. However, he is not like an earthly king or judge. He does not wield power at random to crush and destroy political opponents. He has the heart of God who loves his creation. He is still the Lamb of God who shed his blood on the cross to save men from their sins. He will reign with God’s love and with true justice and righteousness.

Look at verse 32. “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.” To the Almighty God, the nations are like a drop in a bucket. When Jesus comes again, people of all nations are gathered before him, great and small alike. America’s President Bush may stand beside a Colombian drug dealer. Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus may stand beside a post-modern college student. Incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi may stand beside a Brazilian tribal housewife from the second century. The genius Albert Einstein may stand beside a Somali auto mechanic. All human distinctions will disappear and all people will stand before Jesus to be judged. Rich and poor, educated and illiterate, popular and obscure, social elite and common man will all stand side by side at that time.

Look at verse 33. “He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” There will be two and only two kinds of people. One kind are compared to sheep. The sheep are put on his right as the blessed. The others are compared to goats. The goats are put on his left as the cursed. To some, sheep and goats look alike. They each have four legs and are of similar color and size. They make similar sounds and may smell alike. But they are quite different. Sheep have fluffy wool, while goats have coarse hair. Sheep are cuddly, while goats use their horns to butt people and wound them. Most of all, sheep are simple and they trust and obey their shepherd, while goats are clever, rebellious and somewhat mean. To the shepherd it is obvious which are sheep and which are goats. King Jesus discerns the inner hearts of all people. He knows who has the heart of a sheep and who has the heart of a goat. His judgment penetrates any kind of hypocrisy to reveal the truth.

Second, “Come, you who are blessed” (34-40).

First of all, in verses 34-40, King Jesus invites the sheep into his kingdom. Look at verse 34. “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.’” The sheep are blessed by the Father. How did they become blessed? Jesus’

first teaching in Matthew's gospel was how to be blessed. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3). The poor in spirit acknowledge their sins and their need for a Savior. The Father accepts them and blesses them with the gospel of salvation. In Acts 3:26 Peter said, "When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." The gospel changes any kind of wretched sinner into a precious child of God. This is God's great blessing on the undeserving. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law and brought us under God's blessing (Gal 3:13-14). Those who are blessed inherit the glorious kingdom of heaven from the Father and share his happiness forever.

The King discerns those who are blessed without making any mistake. His judgment is supported by evidence. Look at verses 35-36. "For 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 a word, the blessed ones practiced the love of God practically, especially toward Jesus' people. They shared their lunch with the hungry and made friends with the lonely. These deeds were not fantastic; they were simple acts of service that came from the love of God. But they were precious to the King and evidence that God's love was in them.

Look at verses 37-39. "Then the righteous will answer him, '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?'" They did not remember doing anything to serve him. They had served others purely to practice the love of God. To those who receive the love of God, practicing it toward others is spontaneous; they do it because they are happy to serve others, not keeping track of their good deeds. Keith Green was born in 1953 with a talent for music. A music company signed him in the hope of making him a teen idol. He made many public appearances and produced records. However, when Donny Osmond arose, Keith lost his popularity. Then Keith began to use drugs and experiment with eastern religions. In reality, he was searching for the truth and the meaning of life. In the midst of this struggle, Jesus met him and took hold of his life. The love of God satisfied his soul and gave him peace. He wrote a song about it called, "Your Love Broke Through." Out of his thanks and joy in Jesus, he began to serve all kinds of needy people in whatever way he could. He invited homeless people, drug addicts, and many others until six houses were filled with them. He produced contemporary Biblical music that was a blessing to many people. He often gave his music away free of charge. He simply shared the love of Jesus in his own heart with others. Still, the question remains, how did the righteous serve the King? Look at verse 40. "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" When the righteous practiced the love of God toward needy brothers, Jesus accepted it as love for him. Let's think about what the King said.

He said, "whatever you did...." This may be something very small. However, to a person in need, small acts of service have tremendous value. When Steve lived in the old UIC Bible house, a leak developed in the ceiling. During rainstorms, a stream of water poured into his room. This discouraged him and disrupted his study. At the time, Dr. Henry Park was very busy as a professor and to oversee a growing fellowship and to serve his family. But when he heard about this problem, he cancelled his afternoon schedule, went to the hardware store, bought all the necessary supplies and repaired the leak effectively and beautifully. When Steve came back, he saw that the work was done, and he was happy. He felt loved. He could study well and continue to grow as a shepherd. The other day Steve reminded Dr. Henry about this. Dr. Henry did not remember it at all. But Steve remembered and Jesus remembers.

The King also said, "...for one of the least of these brothers of mine...." To Jesus, each of his people are so precious that he shed his blood for them. Jesus is aware of their needs in detail and he cares for them. Those who have helped even one needy brother in Christ will be remembered by him. Therefore, we should love others, beginning with one person. Consider Mother Teresa. In 1946, she received God's call to serve him "among the poorest of the poor." In 1952, she opened "Pure Heart" a home for the dying in Calcutta, India. Now we see that tens of thousands have been comforted and blessed through her. But according to her own confession, the decision to help the first person was the hardest. After committing to help one person, she could help many. And as she served them, she met Christ again and again. As one woman lay dying, she told Mother Teresa, "Thank you," with a big smile, and squeezed her hand. Then the woman closed her eyes and departed. Mother Teresa felt the love of Christ through the dying woman. She felt that this one person was more precious than the whole world. When we help one of the least of these with the love of God, we are serving Jesus himself and Jesus will remember it on that day. But we must decide to begin with one, no matter who he may be.

Then who are the least of these? It may refer primarily to young Christians in Jesus. College students can be the least of these. A young man struggling with his sinful desire may seem to be useless. But when he is cared for with the word of God and prayer, he can overcome himself and do great things in the future. A young woman of base desires may seem to be useless. But through proper spiritual care she can be changed into a blessing to the world. Serving college students with one-to-one Bible study may be the best way to serve Jesus in our time. Then again, perhaps CBF children are the least of these. They are demanding and need a lot of help. Their CBF teachers share the word of God with them every week and love them in many ways. These precious teachers are not compensated humanly, but they are growing in the image of our Lord Jesus. King Jesus will reward them on that day. We must think seriously about Jesus' words in this passage. Jesus really wants us to practice his love beginning with even one person. This may not seem to be a great thing, but it is the most precious thing to Jesus.

Third, "Depart from me, you who are cursed" (41-46).

In verse 41, Jesus turns to those on his left and says, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." The goats are sent into eternal punishment in hell. For what are they punished so severely? Is it because they are all serial killers? No. Look at verses 42-43. "For 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." These people were too selfish to care about others. They were blind to the needs of those around them as they lived for their own pleasure and comfort. They do not know the love of God. They were not changed in the inner person. Jesus does not let such people come into the glorious kingdom.

The goats are surprised. They answer, "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 claimed they had no opportunity to serve the King. But he replies, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (46).

The point of this parable is very simple. When Jesus comes again in his glory he will welcome into his glorious kingdom those who have accepted the gospel and shown by their deeds that they love others. But he will send to eternal punishment the selfish. The problem is that we are naturally selfish. Even the disciples of Jesus had to struggle hard to overcome their selfishness. Perhaps Matthew was the most selfish. In his selfishness, he had become a tax collector. He made others suffer a lot to enjoy his own comfort. But as he followed Jesus, he was changed. He became a most loving and sacrificial man who bears the image of Christ. We should not be fatalistic about our selfishness. Let's come to Jesus, accept his love and saving grace, and learn to love others as Jesus did. Let's make a decision to serve one person. Then we will hear him say, "Come, you who are blessed, take your inheritance." This is the best way to prepare for his Second Coming in power and glory.