

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #46 ~ Matthew 25:31-46 ~ The Sheep and the Goats ~ Scripture

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. 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. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

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. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

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.’

⁴¹ “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. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ 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.’

⁴⁴ “They also will 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?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Parable #46 ~ Matthew 25:31-46 ~ The Sheep and the Goats ~ Questions

Note: Some Biblical scholars regard these verses as a parable; others call it a word picture of the last judgement. It doesn't matter; what matters is the message that Jesus wants us to take from it to impact our lives today.

1. Where will all the nations be when Christ returns? (25:31-32) He says he will divide all peoples as a Shepherd does what? Is it difficult to separate sheep from goats? (Hebrews 13:20, Matthew 10:38)
2. What will Jesus say to those on his right (the sheep)?
3. How will the sheep respond to Jesus' words on that day? (25:37-39) How does Jesus respond to their questions? (25:40)
4. What did Jesus say to those on his left (the goats)? How did they reply? How did Jesus reply to them? (25:41-45)
5. How do people today usually determine whether they will be nice to someone?
6. Would your behavior change if you treated every person in your life as if he or she was Jesus? How?
7. In several recent parables, Jesus emphasizes being faithful and using your gifts (parables of the talents, minas, watchful servants) but didn't say what that means. Here he lists five specific things that we are to do. They are:
8. Who are the people gathered before Jesus in this final judgement: gentiles, Jews, Samaritans, believers, non-believers, all humanity?
9. Who are the needy or "the least of my brothers" that we are to serve? (Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 10:40-42, 12:46-50)
10. This story sounds as if Jesus is saying that he is going to judge us based on our works, on our deeds. But surely we're saved by our faith, not by works? Surely it doesn't depend on what we do, does it? (James 2:14-18)
11. What specific act of kindness toward a needy person can you do today?

Parable #46 ~ Matthew 25:31-46 ~ Sheep and Goats ~ Leader's Guide

Note: Some Biblical scholars regard these verses as a parable; others call it a word picture of the last judgement. It doesn't matter; what matters is the message that Jesus wants us to take from it to impact our lives today.

1. Where will all the nations be when Christ returns? (25:31-32) He says he will divide all peoples as a Shepherd does what? Is it difficult to separate sheep from goats? (Hebrews 13:20, Matthew 10:38)

Jesus says that "all the nations will be gathered before him."

Pertaining to separating sheep and goats, in Asia and Africa sheep and goats are often similar in appearance—consistent with them belonging to the same created kind of animal. Non-shepherds find it difficult to distinguish such sheep and goats, but the shepherd knows the difference and easily separates them. For example, there are differences in behavior: sheep tend to follow; goats go their own way. At the judgment, the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) will know the difference and will separate those who followed Him (Matthew 10:38) from those who went their own way.

2. What will Jesus say to those on his right (the sheep)?

He says the words in Verses 34 to 36.

3. How will the sheep respond to Jesus' words on that day? (25:37-39) How does Jesus respond to their questions? (25:40)

The sheep are confused and ask the questions in Verses 37 to 39. And Jesus responds by essentially equating himself with the poor and needy.

4. What did Jesus say to those on his left (the goats)? How did they reply? How did Jesus reply to them? (25:41-45)

5. How do people today usually determine whether they will be nice to someone?

6. Would your behavior change if you treated every person in your life as if he or she was Jesus? How?

7. In several recent parables, Jesus emphasizes being faithful and using your gifts (parables of the talents, minas, watchful servants) but didn't say what that means. Here he lists five specific things that we are to do. They are:

1. Give a poor or needy person food and drink.

2. Provide shelter, a room, or even a house for a stranger or someone in need. This could be as simple as providing hospitality or taking someone in for a night or it could be a longer-term commitment. For example, each summer on Beyond The Walls trips to Guatemala we build 5 or 6 hours for people living in the Guatemala City Garbage Dump.

3. Provide clothes for someone in need. How many coats did the Market Street Mission collect and give out last fall in the Coat Giveaway?

4. Help people who are sick, injured, mentally, or emotionally hurting. In some instances you can actually give or pay for medical help, but just saying a prayer with someone counts too.

5. Visit someone in prison. Or write a letter.

Sure, it's easier to just ignore these situations and do nothing. You might think, after all, these poor people aren't worth my time and money; they just have their hand out to everyone; they're just trying to get a free ride. Hey, I need just as much as some poor slob on the street; why doesn't he try to help himself? Good grief, I'm not rich; I need to take care of myself and my family first before I can think about someone else. Get real: I have better things to do with my time and money. I give money to the church and charity; they have people specifically to help these needy people. And if I give something directly to a poor person, I don't get a tax writeoff. The government has programs to help poor people and I'm paying for that with my taxes. Lots of good excuses. What do you think Jesus would say if you presented these excuses to him?

8. Who are the people gathered before Jesus in this final judgement: gentiles, Jews, Samaritans, believers, non-believers, all humanity?

The identity of those who are gathered is disputed, but it is probably all of humanity. The passage belongs to a long section full of stories and examples for believers and one might expect here a solemn appeal to those within the church. Several commentators call this the "Gentile Judgement," but the passage itself has no support for such a limitation.

9. Who are the needy or "the least of my brothers" that we are to serve? (Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 10:40-42, 12:46-50)

Somewhat surprisingly, there is considerable disagreement among Christian commentators as to the identity of "the least of my brothers" that we are to serve.

Bob Wilkin of the Grace Evangelical Society says in no uncertain terms that this is the Judgement of the Gentiles and that "the sheep are praised and inherit the kingdom. The goats are rebuked and cast into hell. The cause for praise or rebuke is how the Gentiles in question treated *believing Jews during the Tribulation.*"

(The Tribulation is a relatively short period of time where everyone will experience worldwide hardships, disasters, famine, war, pain, and suffering, which will wipe out more than 75% of all life on the earth before the Second Coming of Jesus takes place.) (<http://www.faithalone.org/index.html>)

A number of other commentators write convincingly that “these brothers of mine” refers to *other believers and followers: pastors, missionaries, Christian workers*. David Couchman of Facing the Challenge (www.facingthechallenge.org) says, “Let’s take a moment to look at some earlier places in Matthew’s Gospel that help us to understand who Jesus has in mind here. In Matthew 10, Jesus sends out his disciples on a training mission. This is what he says to them:

‘He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the Father who sent me.’ (Matthew 10:40-42) So in this instance, Jesus talks to his own followers, and says, ‘if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded.’ That is exactly the same thought as in this parable in Matthew 25.

Then in Matthew 12:46-50 – ‘While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to 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.’

Back to chapter 25: If we put these two quotations together with the earlier parables in chapter 25, we can see that Jesus is talking about his own people, his true family. He’s talking about how those being judged treated *Christian believers*.

I personally don’t fully buy either of the explanations above that those you are to take care of and that those Jesus says he is like, are *Jewish believers during the Tribulation* or *Christian believers and followers*. I identify the “least of these brothers of mine” with the *needy in general*. This seems more consistent with Jesus’ commands to ignore distinctions between insiders and outsiders and with Jesus’ injunction to love one’s enemies. The concept of this kind of service has its roots in the Old Testament in Proverbs 19:17, “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and will be repaid in full.” What is new here is the Son of Man’s identification with the needy.

10. This story sounds as if Jesus is saying that he is going to judge us based on our works, on our deeds. But surely we’re saved by our faith, not by works? Surely it doesn’t depend on what we do, does it? (James 2:14-18)

James 2:14-18 – ‘What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the

same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.'

So... if you are relying on your faith in Jesus to save you on judgment day, but you are carrying on living the same kind of selfish life as the people around you who don't believe in him, watch out. Beware! The Bible doesn't give you any reassurance at all that you will really be saved.

Good works aren't the reason we're saved; but they are the evidence that we're saved. We've talked about this before, but let me state it again, 'If you were put on trial for being a follower of Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'

Jesus is saying here in Matthew 25 that on judgment day, he will look for evidence that we belong to him—and that evidence is shown in how we've treated the least of his brothers and sisters.

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