

"THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS"

Matthew 25:31-46

Have you given much thought to your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? A meteorologist predicts a *snowmegeddon* and everyone rushes to the store to stock up on essentials. A preacher stands in the pulpit and preaches on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and people yawn. There's something wrong with that picture!

Lee Eclov was hanging out at a bagel shop one day. He asked a couple of non-Christian friends, **"What's the most important thing I can pray for you?"**

The woman was taken back. *"Health, I guess,"* she said.

"Health? That's not the most important thing. Sooner or later your health is going to go, no

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matter who prays for you. There must be something more important than that."

She was stumped. "*What's more important than that?*"

"What about your relationship with God?"

"I never thought about that."

Then her husband said, "*You mean God is going to haul us into court or something?*"

Now I was surprised. **"Yeah," I said, "I guess you could say that."** (*Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois*)

We have been in a series called "*Perfect Ending*" for some time now. This verse-by-verse study has taken us through Matthew 24-25 (the Olivet Discourse). If you remember, Jesus has been answering some questions the disciples asked as they were leaving the temple . . .

Matthew 24:3... As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these

things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

In a series of parables, the Lord Jesus emphasized the importance of being ready when He does come again.

Matthew 24:29–31... "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. **31** "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

The Lord Jesus Christ who was crucified to atone for our sins, who was buried, who was raised from the dead, and who ascended to heaven is going to

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come again. We must stay alert and be ready at all times . . .

Matthew 24:42... "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming."

When our Lord comes, He will initiate a series of judgments. The first one will be what many have labeled *The Sheep and Goat Judgment* or *The Judgment of the Nations*. I hope you're not shocked that Jesus, as the man in the bagel shop put it, "*will haul people into court for judgment.*" For the next few minutes, let's open our Bibles to Matthew 25 and put a bow on our "**Perfect Ending**" series.

Matthew 25:31... **"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.**

This judgment will take place when Jesus comes in His glory after the seven years of tribulation. God the Father has delegated to the Lord Jesus the authority to judge the nations . . .

John 5:22–23... “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, **23** so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

The amazing thing is not that Jesus will someday come in glory to judge the world but that He first came in humility to save sinners like you and me!

The Lord will come with His angels and with believers. This includes Old Testament believers, believers in the church who have died and been translated to heaven, believers who will have been raptured, and believers who will have been martyred during the Tribulation. They will all accompany Christ and his angels when He descends to earth to establish His millennial kingdom.¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 4, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 115.

Colossians 3:4... When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

"Then He will sit on His glorious throne"— Christ will reign over the earth (Isaiah 9:7, Revelation 20:1-6) from Jerusalem for a thousand years.

Joel 3:16–17... The LORD roars from Zion And utters His voice from Jerusalem, And the heavens and the earth tremble. But the LORD is a refuge for His people And a stronghold to the sons of Israel. **17** Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, Dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, And strangers will pass through it no more.

Matthew 25:32-33... **"All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left."**

"Nations" refer to every person alive on earth when the Lord returns. During that dreadful time of tribulation, multitudes of Gentiles (see Rev.

7:9, 14), as well as all surviving Jews (Rom. 11:26), will be brought to faith in Christ. Believers (the sheep as Jesus refers to them here) who are alive at the Lord's coming in glory will go directly into our Lord's earthly kingdom in their earthly bodies.

Notice, there is a separation between "sheep" and "goats." Palestinian shepherds frequently had to separate their flocks in this way. In a similar way, **the Lord Jesus will separate believers from unbelievers when He returns to establish His millennial kingdom.** He will put the believing sheep on His right, the place of favor and blessing. The unbelieving goats will be put on the left, the place of disfavor and rejection.²

Matthew 25:34–36... "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat;

² John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 4, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 121.

I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

Jesus chooses the sheep to represent those individuals who are blessed by God and therefore inherit his kingdom. **These sheep represent those believers who have survived the horrors of the tribulation.** They will be ushered alive into the kingdom of our Lord where they will receive their inheritance!

The good deeds commended in Matthew 25:35–36 are the *effect* of salvation, not the *cause* of salvation. In this context, these actions are directed to the Jewish people and to those who have believed in Jesus during the tribulation. Good works like these are the direct overflow of the fruit of the Spirit in a believer's life—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

1 John 3:17–18... But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

The assurance of true salvation is not found in a past moment of decision but in a continuous pattern of righteous behavior.

Matthew 25:37–39... **"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?"**

The text never says they did not understand how they had ministered so directly to Jesus. The good deeds mentioned in these verses all deal with common, everyday needs. There is no mention of monumental undertakings or of spectacular accomplishments.

Matthew 25:40... “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’”

Whatever believers do for each other they also do for their Lord Jesus Christ, and the person who genuinely receives and serves Christians in Christ's name proves he himself is a Christian.

Those who will have met the needs of Jews and fellow believers will themselves have suffered great need. Most of them will have resources hardly sufficient to meet their own needs. Their divinely inspired generosity to each other will set them apart as the Lord's people.³

Matthew 25:41–43... “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 4, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 125.

thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

These are accursed because they rejected Christ.
They are doomed forever! J.C. Ryle wrote:

Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body; the eternal sting of an accusing conscience; the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels; the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised; the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future—all this is misery indeed: it is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold.⁴

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 543–545.

Matthew 25:44–46... “**Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ 45 “Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ 46 “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”**

The person who is shut out of the kingdom of God is not condemned because of the greatness of his sin but because of the absence of his faith.⁵ Ultimately there will only be two kinds of people in the world—the sheep and the goats; the saved and the lost!

CONCLUSION

Here's the point I want you to grasp today. . .

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Matthew](#), vol. 4, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–1989), 126.

**YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS IS THE
MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE!**

Don't minimize it. Make sure you are ready for His coming. Demonstrate Christ's Lordship over your life by meeting the needs of others!