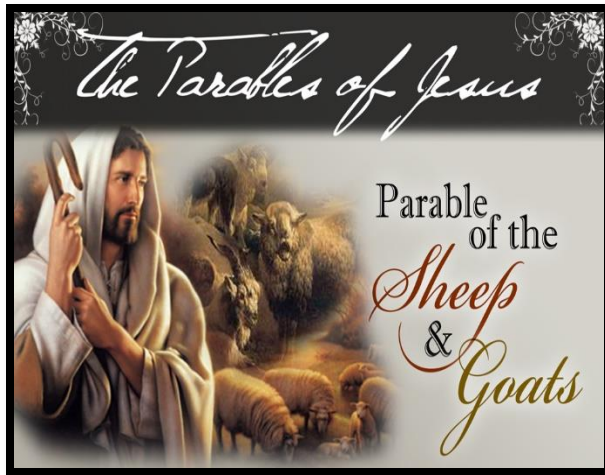


## Being Ready by Helping Others

### Matthew 25:31-46

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567)

To hear that we “will one day see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (26:64) provokes mixed emotions. Just the thought of leaving this world that is not our home (Hebrews 13:14-16), being vindicated as righteous (Luke



18:7), and meeting and spending an eternity with Jesus (John 14:1-4) fills the believer with unspeakable joy. Whereas His first appearance was one of obscurity,<sup>1</sup> lowliness (Philippians 2:7-8), service and atonement;<sup>2</sup> upon His return Jesus will be seen in His glory not just as the Lamb that was slain (1 Peter 1:19-20) but in His full deity,<sup>3</sup> accompanied by the angels and sitting upon His throne (25:31)!<sup>4</sup> Not everyone will be happy to see Jesus! The Father who is the judge of the vision of Daniel 7<sup>5</sup> has given Christ the authority to execute judgement<sup>6</sup> on

both the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5) because He is the Son of Man (John 5:19-29)! The theme of judgement that runs throughout Matthew reaches its climax in chapter 25<sup>7</sup> when Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Iain D. Campbell, [Opening up Matthew](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 635.

<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener, [Matthew](#), vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 25:31–46.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 809.

<sup>5</sup> R. T. France, [Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 359.

<sup>6</sup> R. T. France, [Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 359.

<sup>7</sup> R. T. France, [Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 357–358.

announces that the court is about to convene<sup>8</sup> not to “depict a trial”<sup>9</sup> but to separate the Sheep from the Goats and eternally “repay every person for what they have done” with the life God has given them (Matthew 16:27)!<sup>10</sup> While Matthew 25:31-46 is often described as a parable<sup>11</sup> it is meant to be a description of what will actually take place on Judgement Day,<sup>12</sup> the Sheep (believers) will be rewarded in heaven and the Goats (unbelievers) will be punished in hell. Remarkably Jesus does not point to following His laws (1 John 5:1-4), or faith in His atoning sacrifice (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9) as litmus tests of being a Sheep, as is given in other places in Scripture, but in taking care of His brothers and sisters (25:40).<sup>13</sup>

### **Are you Ready for Jesus’ Return?**

The parables of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew accentuate the truth that the suddenness of the return of the Lord<sup>14</sup> means everyone ought to remain in a perpetual state of readiness to be found faithful!<sup>15</sup> To be a Sheep not only does a person need to have faith in Jesus (1 John 2:20–23; 4:2–3; 4:15; 5:1) and obey His commands (1 John 2:3–6; 3:4–10; 5:2) but also show their love for other believers (1 John 2:9–11; 3:14; 4:7–21) by taking care of their physical and spiritual wellbeing.<sup>16</sup> In the parable of the *Homeowner and the Thief* (24:43-44) we learn of the danger of letting “peace and safety” or the delay of the Lord’s return lull us into focusing on the things of this world instead of His kingdom that will inevitably come! The Sheep are to “keep

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<sup>8</sup> Craig A. Evans, [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 467.

<sup>9</sup> Robert H. Mounce, [Matthew](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 236.

<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Mounce, [Matthew](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 235.

<sup>11</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 633.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 633.

<sup>13</sup> R. T. France, [Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 358.

<sup>14</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 814.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 633.

<sup>16</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 541.

watch” (24:42)<sup>17</sup> by living righteous lives regardless of their circumstances or what kind of person may be watching their behavior.<sup>18</sup> They are to “live each day so that they will neither be afraid of Tomorrow nor ashamed of Yesterday!”<sup>19</sup>



In eagerly “waiting with all creation for its full liberation (Romans 8:18-25)<sup>20</sup> their hope lies in God’s kingdom, not in the kingdom people create!”<sup>21</sup> In the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* (25:1-13) we learn that since we do not know the day or the hour of Christ’s return (24:36) to be found faithful one must strive to live “every moment of each day, whether in the privacy of our homes, with unbelievers, or in the recesses of our minds in a manner that at no time would we be ashamed if Christ returned.”<sup>22</sup> In the *Parable of the Bags of Gold* we learn that being prepared for the Lord’s return also

means “intentional productivity”<sup>23</sup> by doing good deeds unto our brothers and sisters in Christ! Those who have been naturally endowed by the Holy Spirit<sup>24</sup> to do kingdom work ought to examine themselves<sup>25</sup> to see if their words, thoughts, and deeds are focused on honorably serving their Master! And finally, in today’s *Parable of the Sheep and the Goats* we learn that since

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<sup>17</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 816.

<sup>18</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 817.

<sup>19</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 817.

<sup>20</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 817.

<sup>21</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 816–817.

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 818.

<sup>23</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 819.

<sup>24</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 819.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 817.

Jesus will return without warning to judge our service one is to live every moment considering the eternity God constantly and joyfully has placed within our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11)!

## Separating the Sheep from the Goats

When the Lord returns, He will gather the “nations before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (25:32). While in most parts of the world this separation of sheep from goats would make little sense considering



they are rarely mixed together, in “the lands surrounding Palestine they often run together, and native breeds can look alike in size, color and shape.”<sup>26</sup> At night they were often separated into two groups: the sheep who can tolerate the cool air, and the goats who must be herded together to keep warm.<sup>27</sup> Another difference between these two groups of animals is that sheep have “greater utility and value” and therefore cost more than goats.<sup>28</sup> The point of Jesus comparing His Day of Judgement to this shepherd simile is to emphasize that even though people live “mixed up together”<sup>29</sup> in

this world they will one day be separated with the sheep being placed on His right and the Goats on His left. The sheep are placed on the right, a place of honor (Psalms 110:1),<sup>30</sup> because as believers, brothers, and sisters of Christ they are destined to go to heaven and spend an eternity with the Master. The goats are placed on the left side of Jesus because they never “knew” or worshipped Jesus and as such are destined to be eternally punished in the lake of fire. There is

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<sup>26</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 809.

<sup>27</sup> D. A. Carson, [“Matthew,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 521.

<sup>28</sup> Craig S. Keener, [Matthew](#), vol. 1, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 25:31–46.

<sup>29</sup> R. T. France, [Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 359.

<sup>30</sup> Craig A. Evans, [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 467.



“no middle ground between the saved and the lost,”<sup>31</sup> you are either a sheep or a goat! At this point in the parable the reader is left to ponder the question: if Jesus returned today which group would He place you?

### **Am I a Sheep?**

Jesus will say those on His right “come blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (25:34). Jesus states what determines if one is on the right side of honor will be based on one’s reaction to human need.<sup>32</sup> Those who are born again will not overlook the needs of others but give the hungry food to eat, the thirsty



something to drink, the stranger an invitation, those lacking clothes clothing, the sick a helping hand, and the prisoner visitation (25:35-36). By showing mercy unto the least of the brothers and sisters one is not only doing it unto the Lord but also showing proof that one is a sheep belonging to the Great Shepherd (25:37-40)! While Jesus is specifically referring to looking after the needs of fellow Christians<sup>33</sup> this does not absolve Christians from their responsibility to show mercy to unbelievers as well.<sup>34</sup> Should not those who are “drawn to show mercy because we see

Christ in them not also be drawn to show mercy to unbelievers” because we hope that our good deeds might point them to the Father?<sup>35</sup> If believers only show love towards those who are like and love them how are they any different than the world or even one’s enemies who knows how to love each other?<sup>36</sup> “True sheep will pass the examination because their love of their neighbors<sup>37</sup> is “good fruit” (Matthew 7:15-20) that comes from being in the vine with their Savior (John 15:1-5)! “The faith that saves by trusting to the work of Christ shows itself to be

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<sup>31</sup> R. T. France, [\*Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 360.

<sup>32</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [\*The Gospel of Matthew\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 540.

<sup>33</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [\*The Gospel of Matthew\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 541.

<sup>34</sup> John Piper, [\*Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

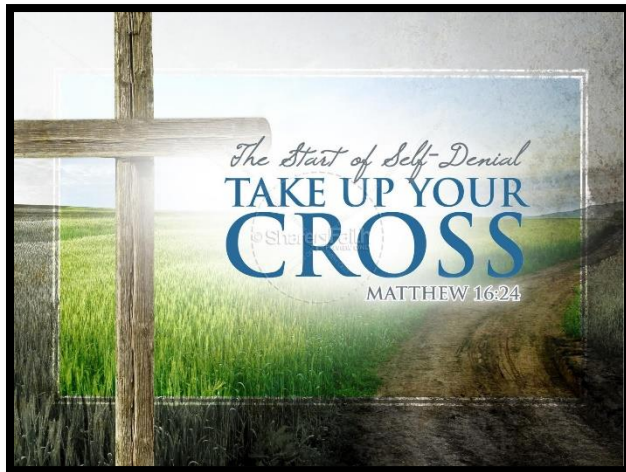
<sup>35</sup> John Piper, [\*Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> John Piper, [\*Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [\*The Gospel of Matthew\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 541.

genuine by its fruits and practical consequences.”<sup>38</sup> And the glorious part is that the sheep do not show mercy to get praise from others but out of the wellsprings of their faith and the compassion they have received from Christ consider it an honor to aid any “image bearer,” born again or otherwise!

The proof one is a sheep is not based on how many great works one has performed for Jesus, how many churches one has helped build, how many bold declarations of faith one has given or even amounts of funds one has given to further God’s kingdom but in taking care of the “basic” necessities or “little things” of the least of the brethren.<sup>39</sup> While doing good works fits



nicely with James’ teaching that faith without deeds is dead, does this mean that Christ believed in a works based salvation?<sup>40</sup> If so would this not contradict Apostle Paul’s Spirit inspired teaching that it is “by grace that we are saved, through faith – and not of ourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9)?<sup>41</sup> Christ in the *Parable of the Sheep and Goats* is not saying good deeds is the **cause but the evidence** of salvation or damnation.<sup>42</sup>

While it is not by philanthropic deeds that one becomes right with God, these good deeds are evidence that “kingdom life has been produced in a person through the transformation and regeneration of their hearts.”<sup>43</sup> True disciples who deny themselves, taken up their crosses and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24)<sup>44</sup> do not do so to “purchase” their salvation but do so in response to “what Christ had done in and for

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<sup>38</sup> Iain D. Campbell, [Opening up Matthew](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008), 153.

<sup>39</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 542.

<sup>40</sup> John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(2000–2014\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 542.

<sup>42</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 634.

<sup>43</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 812.

<sup>44</sup> Iain D. Campbell, [Opening up Matthew](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008), 152–153.

them.”<sup>45</sup> This means in considering others better than oneself (Philippians 2:3) one offers one’s own resources even if one’s “little” cannot alleviate their poverty at least one can joyfully remind the least of the brethren they are still masterpieces of His grace and deeply loved! It is precisely through this sacrificial giving that one demonstrates one’s faith by living “life in harmony with Christ’s commands”<sup>46</sup> and servanthood example! At this point in the parable the reader is left to ponder the question: since only a “good tree” can bear good fruit, upon close examination are there sufficient good deeds in your life to assure you that you indeed have a regenerate heart of a sheep rather than a reprobate mind of a goat?

### Are you a Goat?

Those who refuse to minister unto Christ by taking care of the hungry, thirsty, homeless, poor, sick and in prison<sup>47</sup> not only show their



“self-centeredness and self-interest”<sup>48</sup> but also show that they are truly goats! “The presence of kingdom life will always produce evidence in the transformed speech, thoughts, actions, and character of Jesus’ followers. The absence of transformation is proof that a person has not accepted the invitation to the kingdom.”<sup>49</sup> In the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* and the *Parable of the Bags of God* the foolish virgins and the lazy servant were not condemned due to some “externally heinous sin”<sup>50</sup> but due to not

doing what was right! To not take care of the least brethren of God’s kingdom is not only a “sin

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<sup>45</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 639.

<sup>46</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 542.

<sup>47</sup> Robert H. Mounce, [Matthew](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 236.

<sup>48</sup> Iain D. Campbell, [Opening up Matthew](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008), 153.

<sup>49</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 813.

<sup>50</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 812.

of omission”<sup>51</sup> but also proof one is not born again. Those who do not show proof of a regenerate heart by taking care of the needs of the least will receive the title “goat” and spend an eternity separated from God in the eternal lake of fire.<sup>52</sup> While the Father wishes that “none shall perish” (2 Peter 3:9) those who reject Christ in this lifetime will be eternally rejected in the next! They will be forever put in hell where even if the “eternal fire” of Matthew 25:42 or the “burning sulfur” of Revelation 20:10 are merely symbolic<sup>53</sup> and the suffering is “only mental, internal, or psychological, it is something that will be “immeasurably and inexpressibly” so bad that it will produce in its recipients “wailing and gnashing of teeth” (25:30).<sup>54</sup> The sad reality is that many of these goats are members of our churches, have done miracles in Jesus’ name and yet they will still hear the words “I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers” (Matthew 7:21-23). They will be astonished and “caught unaware” because what few deeds they did were not for the Shepherd with a regenerate heart but to obtain praise from their fellow members (Matthew 6:1-18)! With such a grueling, heartbreaking and utterly terrifying description of hell, the reader is left to wonder: have I made Jesus the lord of my life as evidenced in the way I take care of the least of His brethren?

## Conclusion

In the sermon series we have talked about many ways a person can serve Jesus regardless of age, economic or national status.



Everyone can offer intercessory prayers, encourage one another, have faith that moves mighty mountains and practice hospitality. Today’s sermon focused on taking care of the hungry, thirsty, homeless, poor, sick and those in prison. In the Olivet Discourse of Matthew we learned how important it is to be ready for the moment Christ returns. Upon His return the court will convene not to depict a trial but to separate the Sheep from the Goats and eternally repay every person for what they have done with the life God has

given them! Those who take care of the needs of the least of His kingdom will be placed on His

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<sup>51</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 640–641.

<sup>52</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, [Matthew](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 812.

<sup>53</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 544.

<sup>54</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of Matthew](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 544.



right side of honor and taken into heaven not because their good deeds purchased their salvation but because they are proof of a regenerate heart! Those who reject Christ in this lifetime will be rejected for all eternity and placed in hell where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth! Since no one knows the day or hour of Christ's return except the Father the only way one can be found faithful upon His return is to live one's life considering the eternity one is about to receive. This means being a living sacrifice that never stops inviting the Good Shepherd to transform your speech, thoughts, actions in such a manner that what Christ has done for you compels you in love to take care of the least of His brethren. I leave you with one final question to ponder: considering how often you take care of the hungry, thirsty, homeless, poor, sick and those in prison which group will Christ put you in: the Sheep of the Goats?