

The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

31[Jesus said,] “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32All 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. 33He 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. 35For 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, 36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40The 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. 42For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I 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.’ 44They 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?’ 45He 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.’ 46Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

1. Using four words from the opening verses of this account (glory, angels, nations, separate), describe Jesus’ return and the events of the Last Day.
2. Jesus’ parable cannot be correctly understood if it is taken out of the context of all of Scripture. What clear and often-stated teachings of the Bible are found in the following passages?
 - “[Jesus] is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11,12).
 - “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).
 - “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).
3. Explain Jesus’ statement: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Who are the “least of these”?
4. As persecution of the church escalated in the first century, it became increasingly dangerous to assist a Christian in the ways mentioned by Jesus in this parable. What, in fact, would a person be doing and professing if he showed kindness to a Christian? What dangers might a person face today for doing the same?

5. Although the sheep and the goats alike asked the King, “Lord, when did we see you, . . .” there was a difference in their questions. Explain.

6. What truth about the judgment is Jesus teaching through this parable?

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, rank your deeds of kindness and love done for your fellow Christians. What comfort and motivation do you find in the words inheritance and righteous?

8. Define and give examples of a sin of omission. What excuses might be offered for such sins?

9. If God truly “wants all [people] to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4) and to live with him in heaven, why did he create a place called hell where he sends some of them?

10. Many try to make light of an unending existence in hell. What do the phrases “eternal fire,” “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” and “eternal punishment” teach us about an existence in hell?

11. The unborn must surely be numbered among “the least.” List several ways through which we will demonstrate our Christian love for them.

Helps: (1) Accompanied by his millions and millions of powerful angels, Jesus will return in all of the glory that is his as the omnipotent God. The sight will be spectacular! All people, those who have lived or are living, will be gathered before Christ and will be judged by him. (2) Jesus is the world’s only Savior. Salvation cannot be earned; it is an undeserved gift from God and becomes ours through Spirit-worked faith in Christ. God’s undeserved love for us in Christ inspires and empowers Christians to love God in return and to love and serve others. (3) The “least of these” are Christians, the brothers and sisters of Christ. Because the Lord dwells with and in believers, what is done for Christians is done for Christ. (4) Those who assisted a Christian were not only running the risk of being accused or implicated with that Christian but they were also, by their actions, boldly identifying themselves as followers of Christ. Those who do so today face dangers that range from ridicule to death. (5) Christians, with their new God-given spiritual life, respond naturally to God’s love by showing love to their fellow Christians; they may not even be conscious of these good works because they are “natural” to a Christian. Unbelievers, however, do not recognize Christ as Lord and Savior and therefore do not recognize the intimate and mystic union between Christ and Christians. (6) Those who believe in Jesus, as evidenced by their lives, will be saved. Those who reject Christ as Savior and give evidence of this in their lives will be damned. (7) In spite of our failings and sins, God declares us righteous through faith in Jesus Christ and promises, as a gift of his grace and not our feeble merit, an inheritance. God’s undeserved favor and salvation move and empower us to love and serve him and our fellow Christians. (8) Responses will vary. A sin of omission is failing to do something that God commands us to do (example, the Fifth Commandment instructs us to help our neighbor in every bodily need). Although they can often be easily excused, these sins are just as serious and damning as sins of commission. (9) Hell was not prepared for people but “for the devil and his angels” (verse 41). God does indeed want all people to be saved. Some, however, reject God’s salvation through unbelief. (10) Those in hell experience the wages of their sin—a horrible and fiery dying and death—for all eternity. Unbelievers will be separated forever from a gracious God and from any and all happiness. They will bear their guilt and be filled with unending rage and hatred of God. (11) Answers are numerous and will vary (encouraging all mothers to carry their unborn children to term, speaking out against the sin of abortion, contacting leaders in government regarding the sanctity of life, supporting the unwed mother who carries her child to term, etc.).