

Matthew 25:31-46 // Parted, Populated, Prized

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[0 : 00] Our first reading tonight is on page 866 in the Church Bibles. It's on Ezekiel chapter 34, beginning in verse 17.

! Ezekiel chapter 34 says this, As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says, I would judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?

Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them.

See, I myself would judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep, because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away.

[1 : 18] I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them.

He will lead them and be the shepherd. I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken.

9.95 of the Bible in front of you. It's from Matthew chapter 25, beginning in verse 31. I'll just give you a second to look that up. Page 9.95.

Matthew chapter 25, from verse 31.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 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.

[2 : 39] He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 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. 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 ill, and you looked after me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me. 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 ill or in prison and go to visit you? The king will reply, Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

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. For I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat.

[3 : 52] 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 ill, I was in prison, and you did not look after me.

They also will answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needing clothes, or ill, or in prison, and did not help you? He will reply, Truly, I tell you, 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. Well, good evening.

Thanks, David, for reading, and thanks. Let me add my welcome to Josh's. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the ministry trainees here at the church, and it's great to see you this evening. I hope it will be a joy for all of us to open up God's word together.

Father, I've absolutely loved our time in Matthew chapter 25 over the last couple of weeks, as we've looked at Jesus' words on his return. I found his teaching to be one of great encouragement, but also one of great challenge.

[5 : 01] And I hope tonight will be the same for you as we open up God's word. So do join me in prayer as we start. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of this time this evening, for us to slow down and gather together with your people.

Thank you for the refreshment and reorientation that can bring. So as we turn now to your word, where there are concerns or worries in our lives, we ask that you would still our hearts, quieten our minds, that we might think afresh upon the Lord Jesus and his promised return.

And in that, would you encourage and challenge us by your spirit. Amen. Amen. The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.

That's the opening statement of NATO, Article 5. An attack against one is an attack against all. And you will face a severe response.

How you treat one of these countries from the littlest, tiniest country in NATO to how you treat America, if you attack one, you attack all. They are united as one.

[6 : 17] And there is no difference for them between how you treat them individually. I wonder if there's anything in your life that you would say the same for.

If you attack my kids, that's the same as attacking me. If you attack my culture, that's the same as attacking me. Maybe if you attack my football team, well, that's really the same as attacking me.

With all these things, what we're saying is that our bonds are so deep, we care about them so much, they're so intrinsically part of who we are, that we can't distinguish between how you treat that and how you treat me.

There's no difference. Well, I hope that tonight, as we look at Jesus' words, we'll be really encouraged that he offers a much better security guarantee and unity than NATO, Article 5, could ever provide.

And challenged to think that if that is true, how then should we live as we await his return together? We're in our last section of Matthew, Chapter 25 tonight, but let's just get our bearings again before we dive in.

[7 : 27] Matthew, Chapter 24 and 25 come right off the back of Jesus speaking about his return to judge the world after he's died, risen, and ascended.

And what will happen at that time? And so back up in Chapter 24, Verse 3, the disciples come and they ask the obvious question. They ask, when will this happen?

And how will we know when it's time? And we've seen Jesus answer that no one will know when he's coming, and so you need to be prepared. That was the parable of the ten virgins.

And if that is true, then everyone should be busy with kingdom work as they await his return. That was the parable of the bags of gold. And he goes on tonight in his teaching.

He carries on, but notice that Jesus' teaching here isn't the exact same as the two parables that have gone before. If you look at Verse 1 of Chapter 25, it says, the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins.

[8 : 31] And then Verse 14, again it will be like a man. But Verse 31, when we start this evening, simply says, when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

There is then something different about Jesus' teaching tonight. It's more direct, it's more matter of fact, it certainly uses images. We're not talking about real sheeps and goats.

But at the same time, it's not as abstract as a parable. And so let's dive in together. There are three points on your service sheet that hopefully you'll find helpful as we go through.

There are three things that we learn about the shepherd king. But much more helpfully, if you could keep your Bibles open, if they've fallen shut, we're on page 995 of the church ones in front of you.

Firstly, then the shepherd king's return prompts the promised parting. Verses 31 to 33. As Jesus sets the scene for the drama that he's going to describe, he uses a lot of Old Testament prophecies to help us understand the significance of the moment.

[9 : 43] In Verse 31, he calls himself the Son of Man, a title from Daniel 7. There in that prophecy, the Son of Man is given an everlasting kingdom and given glory by the Father.

And that kingdom will be one where all nations will come and serve him. And when he sets up that eternal kingdom, in doing so, he will judge that which came before because they oppressed his holy people.

And so Jesus is saying he comes as the promised king on his throne, ready to judge and to establish his kingdom when he returns.

But he's also the promised shepherd. Earlier in the service, David read from Ezekiel chapter 34 for us, where God speaks to his people Israel and promises that one day a shepherd will come from the line of David who will come and rescue God's people, not from foreign enemies, but from people within the flock who oppress them and abuse them.

Look at verse 32 of our chapter. 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.

[11 : 03] He'll look at his sheep and he'll prompt the promised parting that verse 33 separates the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

That image sounds kind of odd to us. We kind of think, well, sheep and goats look quite different. I reckon I could probably get that one right. But in the Middle East and back at that time, it was common for sheep and goats to get muddled up between them and they're nowhere near as obvious to separate as the ones that we get in Scotland.

And during the day, they would get muddled up, but if they weren't separated at night, the goats would apparently freak out in their pen and hurt the sheep that they were in the pen with. It's an image that Ezekiel uses to say that those who were oppressing and abusing God's people weren't really sheep at all.

Instead, they were goats who happened to have some sheep-like features. And so the big question for us tonight as we dive into this, well, our big question for us is who exactly is Jesus talking about and to?

Is it everyone, literally all of the nations? Or is it those that think they're sheep but aren't? People disagree on this a lot, it turns out.

- [12 : 23] Some think it's everyone to have ever lived before the throne of Christ being judged. others think that in context it's only those who are Christians or think that they're Christians but never really were.

In the last two parables we've had a pattern that has been those thinking they're in missing out. So in the ten virgins, five virgins set out to meet Christ but found themselves locked out of the wedding banquet.

One servant in the parable of the bags of gold thought they knew the master but was then thrown out into the darkness. But I do think that tonight our teaching is slightly different.

I've agonized over this a lot this week exactly how this lies. You can ask Jane how many times I've interrupted her at her desk to get her opinion on things. But I think the best way to understand it is that Christ is speaking about everyone but he's speaking to, he's targeting those who are religious, who presume they're in even when they're not.

Let's think about it together. In Ezekiel 34 God promises he'll be their true shepherd who will part the sheep from the goats with a particular focus on removing those who look like sheep but abuse God's people and certainly don't care for them.

- [13 : 50] In Jesus' day many Jews presumed that their Jewishness assured them of automatic salvation thinking this great shepherd would come and the great dividing line would be are you a Jew or are you a Gentile?

That's what they thought mattered for salvation. And it's a thought that we see continue in Scotland today. People who think well if I go to church that assures me of salvation.

There's so many people who don't go to church I'm at church every week that'll be fine. people who think that being good is what is the dividing line for God's judgment. People who think if I call myself a Christian and have a Sunday personality that will do.

But here Jesus says something very very different. Jesus says I'll gather all the nations and I'll bring my promised parting but the dividing line is how did you treat my people?

to those assuming they're safe Jesus' words tonight is meant to deeply unsettle them. It's meant to make them think again it's targeted to those who presume that they're in making them realize the dividing line is not what they think it is.

- [15 : 07] Just like in Ezekiel there will be some who are in some who look like they're sheep but turn out to be goats and Jesus will find them out he says no one who fails to care for God's people will be found on the right side of judgment and this is really good news for us that Jesus promises he will bring this judgment especially if you're someone who finds church hard right now maybe you're someone who's been hurt by a goat amongst the flock who cared for themselves and not for Christ's people for now we live with goats amongst the sheep people using church for their own gain not Christ's it's partly what can make church a place of great relational strain we all feel sometimes that it's not what it could be but when our great shepherd king returns the promised parting will happen verse 33 the true sheep will be gathered on his right a pure flock all those who truly know

Christ and those who never truly knew the great shepherd on his left and isn't that a glorious thought that after thousands of years of church infighting of splits of division of turmoil often caused by goats looking like sheep the shepherd king will bring his promised parting that purifies his flock forever all of Christ's people from across the nations in true unity gathered on his right hand side and what a sight that will be and that's not to mention Christ being there on his glorious throne with his glory and with all the angels I can't wait it's been such a joy to look at this passage and I hope you're excited too but that this evening is just the scene set we get more drama ahead of us and as you'll see on your service sheets we're going to take two runs at verses 34 to 46 looking at two slightly different things firstly then the shepherd king's return populates the prepared places after Christ's judgment he in his role as king directs the sheep and the goats to two very different places that have been prepared and throughout these verses there is a massive contrast and not only what Jesus says to them but their fates as well

Luke at verse 34 with me to the sheep the king says come you who are blessed by my father take your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world the great shepherd king who laid down his life for his sheep will bid you come come to me and come as someone who is blessed by the father one whom the lord takes delight in and makes his face to shine upon who receives his goodness and kindness come into the presence of god and take your inheritance come in as an adopted daughter an adopted son into his family and take the inheritance god has for you the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world it's been prepared and he bids his sheep come and this isn't an emergency option it's not a patchwork put in place so his sheep have somewhere to go no it's a kingdom that's been prepared since the creation of the world as we know it made for the sheep that

Christ knew and prepared for them there's a beautiful place waiting for Christ's sheep and so why are the sheep bid to come well verse 35 Jesus says 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 Jesus says that they have cared for and received him only for those who have already been judged righteous to turn around in verse 37 and go when when did we do that for you Jesus notice they ask when three times and maybe at this moment imposter syndrome kicks in for them and they go am I not meant to be here am I really a goat that's missed the judgment and got on the wrong side I've got no recollection of doing any of that

I wasn't around when Jesus was on earth but of course not Jesus replies in verse 40 truly I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me honoring Christ is honoring his people loving Christ is loving his people he's united to his people and so how you treat them is how you treat him and then we get a nearly identical list in verses 42 and 43 as he sends the goats away and just like the sheep the goats are surprised at his reasoning and ask verse 44 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 perhaps cries of whoa that's unfair Jesus I never saw you on earth but I knew it was you well obviously

[21 : 16] I would have done those things I would have given you a cup of water I would have fed you and clothed you and homed you if we'd known it was you we would have done those things and again Jesus says whatever you didn't do for these you didn't do for me you may well call me Lord just like the sheep did but you don't really know me and is this then works based salvation is Jesus saying that if you feed water welcome clothes visit and care for his sheep enough you will be saved do enough and you'll be good it's a passage that in many ways seem to say exactly just that but Matthew's gospel is driving at the exact opposite constantly throughout Matthew Jesus is hammering home to the Pharisees works based religion just does not work it's utterly worthless it gets you nowhere at all and so of course this isn't what

Jesus is saying if this was based on works surely we'd expect Jesus to come out with something like my sheep kept the ten commandments that would be the go-to thing but instead it's about did you love the sheep it is only by faith and a personal relationship with Christ that you can be saved that you can enter the kingdom nothing else will do if you love Christ it will overflow to love other people those who love him our union with Christ means that we're also united to other people who are united to him when Jesus tells the sheep that they're blessed and welcomed because they did all these things for Christ's people they're surprised they don't turn around and go yeah of course we did that's why we're here we did all those great things so that you would let us be in the kingdom no not at all they didn't realize that's what they were doing they didn't love sheep so that they would be saved they did it because they loved Christ and that overflowed out of them and so what a contrast in verse 41 for the goats look at what he says to them then he will say to those on the left the goats depart from me you who are cursed into an eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels it's not an invitation to come it's a demand to depart it's not you who are blessed by my father but you who are cursed while the sheep were always meant to be in the new creation it was prepared for them these goats are not going to a place prepared for them it's not a place they belong but tragically it's a place that they end up

Jesus is exceptionally clear there is a coming judgment where everyone will appear before him and he will sort humanity into true sheep and everybody else there is certainly a judgment coming you don't want to be on the wrong side of it the dividing line isn't how religious you are it's not your ancestors it's not what you do it's not whether you turn up to church it's not whether you keep everything God says it's if your love for Christ is genuine and if it is well it overflows to love his sheep too maybe you've been at church all your life and you believe there is a coming judgment beyond no illusion that just coming to church by itself will be of no use for you at that time you need to love Christ and a great way of telling that is do you love his sheep you can't fake it to make it only those who are truly

Christ sheep will enter and verse 46 states the contrast even clearer for us Jesus says then they will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life for those who don't join the true flock of Christ as humble sheep the great shepherd king will banish them to eternal punishment while the righteous head to eternal life perhaps you're new to church this evening the idea of Christianity and what it is to be a Christian is new to you see that Jesus doesn't demand people to fulfill a bunch of rules he doesn't demand people to be good enough to keep a bunch of moral laws but to humbly love people in response to what he has done for them not to achieve something but in response to what he's achieved for us and know that that really is the only way to have eternal life the shepherd king's return will populate the prepared places separating out those who truly knew him from those who only claimed to but in that stark warning we see a beautifully encouraging point the shepherd king's return prizes his precious people

Jesus here doesn't just have a warning for his disciples but an encouragement to being a part of Christ's flock means that Christ identifies so closely with you that he takes how other people treat you personally there is little to no distinction for him he says I'm united to them they are mine an attack or rejection of them is a rejection of me Matthew is heading for its great conclusion in the great commission where Jesus tells his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations and so for the first readers of Matthew these words would be of precious comfort as they went to evangelize a world that knew nothing of the gospel as they faced being thrown out of synagogues and excluded from society for sharing

[27 : 58] Christ they could know that their rejection is Christ rejection and that he doesn't leave the oppression of his people unpunished some of them would very much go as missionaries with one staff and one cloak needing to be received and fed and watered and welcomed and where they were rejected they would move on from that town and they would take the gospel message with them that town's rejection of them was very much their rejection of Christ the rejection of the gospel we've seen this already back in chapter 10 as Jesus was instructing his disciples to go out and share the good news in towns and villages around them he told them this whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward reward and if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple truly

I tell you that person will not lose their reward reassurance that gospel work done for Jesus doesn't go unnoticed Christ notices the smallest of acts in loving his people of giving water to a thirsty Christian and it goes a long way in his kingdom and if this is how Christ views his people then a true marker of faith is surely do you prize his people the way that he does do you value the church do you give of yourself sacrificially to uphold and support other Christians the shepherd king's return truly does prize his precious people and only those who do the same he will bid to come and to share in his inheritance As we await his return we do it together knowing that we are all united to each other by being united to

Christ and that radically transforms how we relate to one another we don't wait as individuals who happen to be waiting for the same thing!

neither are we competing no we're together as part of the shepherd king's flock and we're called to prize his precious people just like he does and so imagine what being a part of a church family would be like where everyone related to each other as they were relating to Christ where there was such a culture where everyone was cared deeply for their practical needs were met hospitality shown where people went out to tend to those who were suffering the effects of a sinful world or who were being oppressed for their faith imagine what a witness that would be to the thousands of people who walk past these doors every single day the wait for Christ's return isn't a single player game nor is it a competitive one but a cooperative one where you win by being last where you win by tending to the other sheep to keep them going trusting in faith that Christ will bring you home because he sees that you love him when you love his sheep so as we relate and interact with other

Christians we are challenged to remember that as we do so Christ considers us to be interacting and relating to him and so if we dishonor them by gossiping about them we dishonor Christ where we neglect to love them and sacrifice for them we neglect to love and sacrifice for Christ but on the flip side we're encouraged that in the suffering and persecution we face for our faith in Christ both on the inside from the goats in church and on the outside Christ stands by us he sees it and he takes it personally there is no better security guarantee than the great shepherd king whose return will bring the promised parting to finally deliver his precious people from the goats and take them to the place that he prepared for them let's pray heavenly father thank you for the lord jesus the great shepherd king who lays down his life for the sheep thank you for his love for us that he willingly gave up his life that we might have eternal life and so we pray that you would help us to wait well for his return waiting together thinking little of ourselves and much of the sheep around us sacrificially loving for each other and keeping our eyes fixed upon eternity in jesus name amen well let me invite you to stand and we'll respond to god