

February 23, 2025

“Ministering Mightily”
Lesson 4

Matthew 25:31-46

Intro

This is the final part of what is called the Olivet Discourse. Jesus is teaching his disciples during the last week of His earthly life, sometimes called the “Passion Week”. This last section of His teaching deals with the final judgment. It gives the standards by which people's lives and actions will be judged when Christ returns.

Read Matthew 25:31-46

1. vs. 31: Jesus here is still answering the disciples' earlier question about signs of Jesus' coming
Jesus says “*When the Son of Man comes in His glory...*”
When indicates two things: the certainty of His return, and the idea of time factor
When Jesus returns, it will be different than when He first came to earth
He will “come in His glory”, and be “seated on His glorious throne”
All the angels will be with Him, instead of “a multitude”
2. vs. 32: When Jesus first came, the angels said the good news was to “all the people”
His return seems to be good news for some, but bad news for others
The focus here seems to be on nations, rather than individuals
Jesus's second coming will bring all nations under both his authority and judgment
Judgments result in separations, as one group is distinguished from another
In the NT, separations always show an evaluation of some kind
Usually they deal with things, behaviors, or people themselves
3. vs. 33: To be on the ruler's right is to have a place of approval and acceptance
This is where the sheep are; the goats are on the left, which implies rejection
There are only two groups here—no middle ground
There will be only sheep or goats in how Jesus separates the people and nations
4. vs. 34: Jesus said He will be sitting on a throne when He comes back—the place of a King
His first kingly pronouncement is to “those on his right”—the sheep
They are invited to “take your inheritance”—to enter into Heaven
This inheritance has been ready for them “since the creation of the world”
This is the inheritance of all Christians; this is the hope that we cling to
We look forward to Jesus' return and to the day we enter into heaven
5. vs. 35-36: Those who are on Jesus' right hand did six things (at least) that Jesus' blessed them for
They met the needs of Jesus physically and emotionally
Jesus will make a further connection in vs. 40
Salvation is by God's grace, not by works that we do
However, our salvation should lead us to appropriate good works
That these two are connected seems to be one of the points of this verse

6. vs. 37-38: The righteous respond that they can't remember helping Jesus when He was in need
They are confused; they saw themselves only as meeting the needs of ordinary people
"When did we see you?" they ask Jesus
7. vs. 39: Here specifically, prison is mentioned
Prisons of the time were not places of long-term incarceration, as they are now
Prisoners were usually awaiting a flogging and then release, or an execution
Both of these would have happened in a relatively short amount of time
The righteous (sheep) are confused as to when they encountered Jesus in prison
Jesus answers their confusion in vs. 40
8. vs. 40: Jesus says they did good to Him when they did good to others
He specifically says "to least of these brothers and sisters of mine"
Brothers and sisters of mine indicates Christians—members of His family
This doesn't mean, however, that Christians are to ignore the needs of non-believers
See Prov. 3:27, Prov. 25:21-22, Matt. 5:45, and Gal. 6:10
During Jesus' earthly life, the least and the lowliest received special attention
9. vs. 41: In this last section, Jesus addresses the goats, the ones on His left
Everything he says to them is opposite of what He said to the sheep
They are to *depart* instead of *come*; they are *cursed* instead of *blessed*
They go to *eternal fire* instead of to a kingdom
This place wasn't "prepared for them" like the kingdom was for the sheep
This place was prepared for "the devil and his angels"
10. vs. 42-43: The same groups who were in need as in vs. 35-36 are brought up again here
The goats did not help these in need, but the sheep did
Notice that the goats aren't accused of doing anything evil
They didn't murder, commit adultery or theft
They are condemned for doing nothing when they should have done something
They had opportunities to meet needs, but chose to look the other way
This sounds like the religious leaders who passed by the hurt man in the story of the Good Samaritan
11. vs. 44: The goats here are just as surprised as the sheep were
"When did we see you...(in need) and did not help you?"
Rom. 1:20 says that people who have seen the natural world are without excuse
The wonders of nature speak to of a Creator that people should acknowledge
If that's true, then people who saw others in need also have no excuse
They should have done something without having to be expressly told to
See 1 John 3:17
12. vs. 45: The goats' failure to address others' needs is a failure to serve Jesus
They are condemned by their own inactions—see James 4:17

13. vs. 46: The contrast is completed here in the outcomes both groups will receive
The goats go to an “eternal punishment”; the sheep to “eternal life”
Eternal punishment includes separation from God and a place where “the fire is not quenched”
Eternal life includes being with the Son forever, a place which is eternally bright
Everything connected to the old sin-cursed, broken world is gone
God will be with His people forever

Application: Jesus holds three positions in this parable: *king* on His throne, a *shepherd* dividing sheep and goats, and a *judge* determining eternal destinies. It is important for us to remember that Jesus isn't just one thing—He is all things. He is prophet and priest and king. He is Creator and Redeemer. He is the Alpha and Omega. Everything was made by Him and for Him. In every area and aspect of our lives, He is the one in authority. Jesus makes it clear in this passage that whenever we serve anyone in need, we are serving Him. This is a high privilege, to serve the Master by caring for those who are the weakest, the neediest, the most in need.

Prayer: Father God, we need You to give us Your eyes and Your heart as we look at the world. Help us not to become callous or indifferent to the hurting people around us. May we never forget that faith without works is dead. In Jesus' name, Amen.