



The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity

November 15, 2020

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Matthew 25:31-46

COME AND INHERIT!



It is perhaps the most terrifying verse in all of Scripture. It certainly is one of them. When we hear it, a shiver should go down our spines. It sounds like this: *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels” (41).* It reminds us of a few things

that we do well not to forget. It reminds us that hell is a real place. It reminds us that the suffering in hell is for eternity. When an unbeliever dies, he doesn't go into oblivion or cease to exist. He isn't given some second chance to repent or to come to faith. It reminds us of these terrifying truths of God's justice. Even the thought of hearing those words, *“Depart from me...”* should terrify us. But that terrifying verse also reminds us of one major difference between the sheep and the goats. Both have to go to something prepared, but the sheep go to something prepared for them, while the goats go to something prepared for the Devil. Eternal hellfire and permanent suffering were never meant for mankind. They were meant for Satan. So, how can we be certain that we will not end up there?

Well, let's contrast the most terrifying verse of this text with the most comforting of this text. We heard what Jesus says to the goats on his left. What does he say to the sheep on his right? *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (34).* Jesus calls the believers blessed. He invites them to enjoy an eternity with God the Father. He tells them to inherit something, which of

course they can't do. My inheritance has literally nothing to do with my works. It is by definition a gift given to me based on my family, which I had absolutely no control over. I didn't choose my family. I didn't decide what my inheritance might be based on it. It was *given* to me. We call that gift grace. But here's the clincher. This is why we know that this entire text has nothing to do with works. That gift of an inheritance was also prepared, just like hell was prepared. But whom was it prepared for? Our inheritance was prepared *since the foundation of the world*. God had in mind to bring you the believer to heaven before the world was even created, long before you were even born. So, how could it possibly have anything at all to do with your works? The answer is that it doesn't.

So, I guess we have to ask, then, what the difference is between a sheep and a goat. They sure sound the same. They both did things in this life. The sheep helped people who were hungry, thirsty, sick, naked, and in prison. They didn't do those things in order to get into heaven. They didn't do them so that they could inherit eternal life. That inheritance was already theirs. So, why did they do those things? Jesus answered that question by what he calls the sheep before they answer him. He calls them *the righteous*. Jesus calls them that twice in this text: *the righteous*. And what is it that makes someone righteous? Is it their works that they do in this life? No, it can't be. Listen to what the apostle Paul says in Romans. Quoting Psalm 14, Paul reminds us that *“there is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Ro 3:10)*. So, how do you become righteous? It is not through works. It is by faith. As Paul goes on to say, *“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over*

all who believe" (Ro 3:22). You see, the righteous whom Jesus addresses in Matthew 25 as he's teaching about the end of the world, they are simply those who have faith in their Savior. And their actions followed. They helped even the least of the brothers of Jesus, and that was like doing it for Jesus. It put a face on the Ten Commandments by showing whom they served.

What's the difference between that and the goats? Didn't the goats also try to do those works? They certainly were looking to do them. They looked like they'd done them. But they didn't do them in faith. They were not righteous, but it had nothing to do with their works. They weren't righteous because they had no faith. And their works proved it. When they saw someone whom they could help, perhaps they helped if they got something out of it. But if there was nothing to gain, they did not feed the hungry and thirsty, or clothe the naked, or take care of the sick and imprisoned. And they may retort that if *Jesus* were there who was sick and hungry and needing help, then they would have helped him. But Jesus' simple answer was, "*No, you wouldn't, because you have no faith.*" That's the difference between a sheep and a goat.

Now, make no mistake, God did not prepare hell for those goats. That is not where God wanted them. He prepared an eternal feast of joy in heaven to be eaten in the presence of God—in fact, he prepared it before the earth's foundation. But those goats didn't want it. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus or faith in him. They rejected him. And so, they will hear the most terrifying words Jesus ever spoke. "*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels" (41).* It sends a shiver down the spine.

So, how can you be certain that you're a sheep and not a goat? How can you be certain that you're on the right side of eternity, and not on the left? How can you be certain the eternal inheritance prepared before the world began is yours? I would direct you to no one else but to Jesus. I would direct you to nothing else but to his Word. I would direct you to nothing else but to his promises. I would direct you to nothing else but to his cross. Certainty comes from what God has done for you. It doesn't come from your heart, or from your works, or from your emotions and feelings. Certainty doesn't come

from your arguments or how well I can persuade you that you're a sheep and not a goat. Certainty comes from this alone: Did Jesus, the God-man born of a virgin, really die on the cross? Did he really go there bearing the sins of the whole world? Did he really forgive all sin of all time of all people? Did he truly reconcile the world to himself by his death? Did he really, truly rise from the dead to break death and ensure the resurrection of all the dead on the Last Day? The answer is yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes! Did you notice that none of those questions had anything to do with you? You can't change whether or not they're true. You can't alter whether or not they happened. You can't affect what Jesus has already accomplished. It's true because it's fact.

But dear friends, when I say they had nothing to do with you, the truth is that those questions have everything to do with you. You see, if Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world, that means that he died for *your* sins. If he really reconciled the whole world to himself, that means he reconciled *you* to himself. If Jesus rose from the dead to break death for the whole world that all should rise on the Last Day, that means that *you* will rise on the Last Day. And what will you hear, dear sheep? You will hear this most wonderful response from your Savior, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (34).* And he won't recount a single sin you've committed. He won't lay out a case against you. He will simply say, "*You had faith in me. You believed the truth. You received the facts. And nothing can change these promises fulfilled.*" And as though that weren't enough, Jesus will lay out evidence. He'll say, "*Look at all you've done for me in faith. You fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and imprisoned.*" And you'll say, "*But I didn't do those things perfectly. I did them begrudgingly and halfheartedly and foolishly and selfishly, not to mention all of my sins besides.*" And Jesus will remind you, "*No, you did them in faith, and the righteous will live by faith. You're holy, because I made you that way. That's why you are the righteous. Now, I'll hear no more about it. Come to heaven with me. Come and inherit!*" What a wonderful thing to hear from our Savior. This is all yours in Christ. Amen.