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Matthew 25:31 - 25:46



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the last parable in Matthew 25, which he believes concludes the Olivet Discourse. The parable is about the judgment of nations, rather than individual judgement, and determines who will be allowed to enter the millennial reign. Gregg explains that Christians should take judgement seriously, and that their works will be considered in the final judgement. He emphasizes the importance of truly believing, as belief shapes how one lives and will ultimately impact the judgement.

Transcript

Today we're looking at that last parable in Matthew 25, which is the concluding parable and concluding section of the Olivet Discourse, the discourse that Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives. And these parables in this chapter, there are three parables, all of them have one message, and that is the second coming of Christ, and the need to be prepared for it. In the first of these parables, the parable of the ten virgins, it was simply a general exhortation to be ready for a long delay, because he said there would be a long delay, and the virgins who were not prepared for that were sorry when they were not ready and Jesus came, or the bridegroom came.

The second parable, the parable of the talents, actually expands upon the responsibilities of the servants as they wait for their Lord to come, and shows that they have been given various abilities to work for their master and to produce something for his kingdom, and they will be proportionately expected to present the fruit of their labor when he comes back, and they will be rewarded for faithfulness. Now we come to the last parable, and this also focuses on how the servants are to behave while they're waiting for Jesus to come back. However, this parable starts a little differently.

The other two parables in this chapter started with the assignment, and then with the performance of the duty, and then the Lord comes back and assesses and settles with the servants or the bridesmaids. In this case, the parable begins with the second coming, and we see the judgment take place, and then it sort of glances back over the behavior of those who stand in the judgment, and so we get sort of a glance back at how they behaved, and they are judged for it here as in the other parables. The parable begins in

Matthew 25, 31.

We usually call it the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus said, Then the righteous will answer him, saying, And the king will answer and say to them, Then they also will answer him, saying, Then he will answer them, saying, Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Now, it's interesting we generally call this the parable of the sheep and the goats, and the reason is because Jesus said he will divide the nations into two categories, like a shepherd divides sheep from the goats, putting the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left hand. After that, however, the parable has nothing to do with sheep or goats. Those on his right hand are no longer compared with sheep, and those on his left hand are no longer called goats.

In fact, they do things that neither sheep nor goats could do. This is a metaphor shift here. The separation of the nations into two categories is likened to a shepherd separating sheep from goats in his flock, but beyond that, the persons involved are not like sheep or goats at all.

We've got people who have opportunity to help the poor and either do or do not do that. And, of course, sheep are not in a position to help people at all. So what we have here is a few verses where he likens this judgment to that separation of sheep and goats that would be commonly seen among shepherds' herds, but then that imagery is dispensed with immediately, and it's just a courtroom scene.

There's a judge, a king, and there's persons who are defendants on trial. Some of them are vindicated and rewarded. Some of them are punished, and, of course, this agrees very much with the high point of each of the previous two parables.

The bridegroom came, and the five virgins who were wise entered into the joy of the wedding feast. The five who were foolish were punished. In the parable of the talents, the master came and he judged.

The faithful stewards were rewarded. The unfaithful steward was punished. Here we have the nations of the world under consideration because Jesus said, The Son of Man, when he comes in his glory and all his holy angels with him, will sit on the throne of his glory, and all the nations will be gathered before him, and he'll separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

Now, all the nations will be brought before him here for this judgment. Unlike the previous parables, this parable is not about the judgment of Christians. This is a judgment of the nations as a whole, that is, of the whole world.

Now, some have made, I think, a mistake in saying that what is happening here is not

the final judgment, but this is, of course, the position of someone who believes there will be a thousand-year millennium after Jesus comes back. They say, well, here Jesus comes back and he calls the nations before him, but according to this view, he's going to send some into the millennium, and some will not be in the millennium. And so he judges nations, they say, as categories.

For example, Great Britain or Babylon or Spain or Assyria or, you know, Edom or Germany or America. These are nations, and the argument that is given by some is that this is not a judgment of individuals determining their final eternal destiny. This is actually a judgment upon national entities and determining whether they will be permitted to enter into the millennial reign and continue there for a thousand years before the final judgment, or whether they will not be allowed to do so.

Now, this, I think, makes some serious mistakes. But before I tell you what I think the mistakes are, I will continue. There are some who believe that the nations that have treated the Jews well will be permitted to enter into the millennial kingdom, and that the nations that have not treated the Jews well will not be.

And that is the reference, some understand, to be to my brethren. Jesus said, inasmuch as you've done it unto the least of these my brethren, you've done it to me. They say, well, Jesus was Jewish.

The Jews are his brethren. And therefore, the scenario that is painted by some is that Jesus returns, he gathers all the nations and judges them as nations, not as individuals, but as nations. And he reviews their history of their treatment of the Jews.

And did they treat the Jews well? Well, then, good. They get to go into the millennium and have an ongoing career for another thousand years before the final judgment at the end of the world. If they have not treated the Jews well, this is already curtains for them.

Those nations will not go into the millennial reign of Christ. This view, which is held by many, I suspect is one of the most poor interpretations of any passage of Scripture I've ever seen applied for several reasons. First of all, the only thing in its favor is that it says he will call all the nations before him and separate them.

And that is argued by some to mean, well, that means as individual nations, not as individual citizens. But that doesn't mean that at all. When Jesus said, go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, he didn't mean the whole countries would become disciples, but that individuals within those countries would become disciples.

A nation cannot become a disciple, although a nation could be made up predominantly of disciples, perhaps, but disciples are individual people. Yet Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations. That means people of all nations, and it means the same here.

All nations will be gathered before him means it won't just be a judgment with Israel. It'll

be an international body. It'll be all people from all nations will be judged at the second coming of Christ.

Now, as far as the reference to them being judged as to whether they go into the millennium or not, this interpretation is made up of whole cloth as an exegesis of necessity by the people who use it. Because the passage clearly does not teach that there will be a millennial kingdom, in fact, seems to teach that there will not be one, and there are many people who believe in a future millennium kingdom, they have to come up with this device to say, well, these people are being sent not to heaven and hell, but into the millennium because they believe there's this intervening thousand years between the second coming of Christ and the actual end of the world. This, however, doesn't agree with the parable itself.

Notice the righteous are not sent into a millennial reign. They are sent somewhere else. It says in verse 34, the king shall say to those on his right hand, come you blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Was that the millennial kingdom? No. In verse 46, it says the righteous go into everlasting life. This kingdom is not a thousand-year reign.

This is everlasting life. This is eternal life. This is an eternal condition, not a temporary condition.

As for the wicked, it does not say that they are deprived of involvement in the millennium. It says that they are deprived of eternal life. It says in verse 41, he'll say to those on the left hand, depart from me, you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And again in verse 46, these will go away into everlasting punishment. So what is at stake here? Is it whether a nation as a whole will have a right to go into the millennium? No, it's about individuals going to heaven or to hell, going into eternal life or into eternal punishment. There's no millennium in this passage.

And the only reason anyone would import it is because they have a theology that requires them to import it. That theology may be open to question when we see that Jesus did not support it. Jesus indicated when he comes back, he'll sit on his throne and he will judge all people.

And some will go into everlasting punishment. Some will go into eternal life. And that'll be the end of it.

There's nothing more to look forward to after that. Everyone has now gone into their eternal condition. And that's all that's left.

Now, something here also that's interesting is that we see the righteous and the wicked

judged at the same time. There are some who believe that the righteous will be raptured seven years before the second coming of Christ. And when they are raptured, of course, they will stand judgment at a separate tribunal, a separate time.

And then later on, at the end of time, when Jesus comes back or whatever, then the wicked will be judged. But in this story, Jesus has all people being judged at the same time. When is that? When the Son of Man returns in his glory.

And all the holy angels with him. Then he'll bring all people, all the nations before him. Some will be saved.

Some will be lost. This is a general judgment of all parties. And it all happens at the same time, not at different times.

Now, what about this suggestion that the brethren of Jesus referred to here refers to the Jews? And that people are going to heaven or going to hell based on how they treat the Jews? Well, that is really a mistaken interpretation, it would seem to me, because Jesus never referred to the Jews as his brethren. In fact, there were even some Jews, although he was Jewish, there were some Jews who were very closely related to him, even his siblings. And he didn't refer to them as his brethren.

On one occasion, his mother and his brothers came to him in Mark chapter 3 and said they wanted to see him. A messenger brought this message to Jesus. He said, well, who are my mother and who are my brothers? He looked around his disciples and said, behold, my mother and my brothers.

He said, for whoever does the will of my father in heaven, he is my mother or brother or sister. In other words, Jesus said my brethren are those who are obedient to my father. And that would be, of course, his disciples.

We call them Christians today. His brethren were not the ethnic Jews in his teaching. His brethren were those who were his followers, the Christians.

So to do such things to his followers, to the Christians, is what is at stake here. So we see that the sheep or the good guys have been in situations where they have found Christians in need. Naked, needing clothing, hungry, unsheltered, uncared for.

And these people have had compassion upon them and have served them. And then we have persons who have encountered the disciples of Jesus in need and have not served them in this way. Now, some have argued that this seems to argue for an eternal judgment based upon works.

And some find this very uncomfortable because they say, well, wait a minute, we're not saved by works, we're saved by faith. But I would point out to you that there are many times in the Bible which speak of the judgment. And it is always a judgment based on

works.

And that is true regardless of whether it is Christians or non-Christians being judged. The judgment in scripture is always one that takes works into consideration. Jesus said in Matthew 16 and verse 27, Notice, the Son of Man comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels.

Notice the first verse of Matthew 25, 31. Then the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his holy angels. Okay, same thing.

What happens? He will reward each one according to his works, it says in Matthew 16, 27. This parable expands on it and tells what kind of works. Works of generosity, works of charity to his disciples.

Now, there are many other places that speak of the judgment. Certainly the Apostle Paul teaches that the judgment will be a judgment of works. If you'd like to consider this in Romans chapter 2, this would be only one place where this comes out, there are others.

But in Romans chapter 2 beginning with verse 5 or verse 6, it says, He will render to each one according to his deeds eternal life to those who by patient continuance and doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality, but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, tribulation, and anguish on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first but also the Greek, but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also the Greek. Now, notice in the day when God recompenses all men, He will recompense glory and honor and peace to everyone who works good, that is who does good works, and to those who do evil, He will reward them with tribulation, anguish, indignation, and wrath. So, we have Paul and Jesus teaching the same doctrine, the judgment will be a judgment that takes works into consideration.

What about another witness on that subject, how about Peter? Peter writes on this subject in the first epistle of Peter, and he says in chapter 1 in verse 17, If you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear. Notice Peter says that the Father that we Christians call upon as our Father, we know that He judges each one impartially according to their works, and therefore we live in the fear of God day by day. So, we have Peter telling us what Jesus and Paul have both told us, that the judgment is a judgment of works, a judgment that is taking works into consideration.

What about John? He's another major writer of the scriptures. John in his book, The Revelation, it says this in verse 12 of Revelation 20, excuse me, Revelation 20 verse 12, he says, And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which was the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by the things which were written in the books. The sea

gave up the dead who were in it, and death and Hades delivered up the dead that were in them, and they were judged each one according to his works.

Right, so, everyone is judged on the day of judgment according to their works. This passage in Matthew 25 is not an exception. It is in tune with everything the scripture says on that subject.

When Jesus returns, he will judge you and me according to our works. Now, someone's going to most likely say, well, then, you're saying we're saved by our works? No, the Bible does not say that we're saved by our works, and it specifically says we are not saved by works. We are saved by faith.

But there's no contradiction on one hand in saying that we're saved by faith and saying we'll be judged by our works, because the Bible teaches that a true saving faith always produces works. If God simply said on the day of judgment, well, did you believe in me? Everyone would say yes. And then, you know, if that's all that was being considered was whether they said they believed in him, then everyone would be saved.

That would be wonderful, but the fact is not everyone is. Many people don't believe in him. Many people who think they believe in him clearly don't believe in him because their lives prove otherwise.

And the best way for God to show a person and show the universe on the day of judgment whether you had faith or not is by displaying your works. If you have faith of a saving sort, you will have works, because faith without works is dead, according to James 2. Paul said the same thing. In Galatians 5, 6, he said, In Christ Jesus circumcision doesn't count for a thing, and uncircumcision doesn't count for a thing.

What counts with God is faith that works through love. Faith that works through love. That is what counts with God, according to the scriptures.

That was Paul saying that. And so he said essentially the same thing that James says, although some have mistakenly thought that those two have contrary opinions. They do not.

Now, if we are saved by faith, it will show in our works. And therefore, on the day of judgment, there will never have to be any confusion of God saying, I don't think you were a believer. And someone saying, Oh, but I was, I was.

Because if you were, it will show. And Jesus said, It will show by the love that you have. Jesus said elsewhere in John 13, 35, By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.

And that means you see the hungry and you feed them. You see the naked and you clothe them. You see the homeless and you do something for them within the limits of

your ability.

Now, that agrees with what Jesus taught elsewhere. In Matthew chapter 7, verse 21, he says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? Then I will declare to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness. Now, here's some people who prophesy and cast out demons and do mighty works in Jesus' name, and they're not saved, Jesus said. Well, then what does save a person? Well, it's not saying, Lord, Lord.

It's having Jesus as your Lord, Lord. In other words, you not only call him Lord, but you live like he is your Lord. If you really believe, then you will live like you believe.

Not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter my Father's kingdom, but him that does the will of my Father, it's what you do. And in Matthew 25, this parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus points out what it is to do the will of the Father. It is when you see the poor, when you see the needy, that you come to their assistance, that you help them, and in particular, the believers.

On one occasion, Jesus said that he that gives so much as a cold cup of water to a disciple will not lose his reward. And so the way you treat a Christian, the way you treat God's servants, is the way that you will be counted as showing that you have faith or you don't have faith. And so the faith of these people, or the lack thereof, is exhibited in how they treat other people.

That's a consistent teaching of Scripture. And therefore, the judgment, when Jesus comes back, will be based on our works. Salvation is by faith, but true faith is exhibited in works.

How will you turn out in that judgment?