

When the Son of Man Comes in His Glory

What is the Final Judgment?

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Judgment, Second Coming

Introduction

Is Jesus here claiming that one day he will sit on the throne of the universe? Is he making the claim that he will be the sole judge of all people from all nations? Is he claiming to be the one who decides the eternal destiny of all people? Is he claiming to possess secret knowledge of God's plans from before the world was created? Is he teaching that doing good deeds is the way to get into heaven? Who exactly are "the least of these my brothers?" Is this another way of referring to all people in general or does he have a more specific group of people in mind? What does he mean by the phrase "my brothers?" Is hell really a place of eternal punishment?

The central question this morning is, What will happen **when the Son of Man comes again in glory** at the end of the age? What will he do?

We are listening in on the conclusion of a private conversation between Jesus and his disciples.¹ The disciples had asked Jesus about the timing of his second coming and now Jesus gives them a very clear picture of what that will be like. This is the "last recorded teaching of Jesus Christ in Matthew's Gospel."²

Jesus has already told them that the exact day and hour of his second coming cannot be known, but there are many things about his return that he does want them to know. Mainly, when he comes again it will be glorious. When Jesus comes again, he will come in great glory!



¹ Matthew 24:3.

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 540.

His glorious second coming will entail a final judgment. Jesus uses one illustration to call an image to mind in the imagination of his disciples and that is one of a shepherd separating sheep from goats. The glorious second coming of Jesus will result in a great division of mankind. The time for parables is over. Jesus is no longer using a parable to explain what his coming will be “*like*,” but rather he now explains what it will happen in fact.

The Glorious Second Coming of the Son of Man

When Jesus comes at the end of the age, he will come in great glory. His glory will be manifested in three ways; 1) by the presence of his **glorious attendants** (i.e. his angels), 2) the manifestation of his **glorious authority** (as we see him seated on a his throne), and 3) in his **glorious assessment** of all nations (i.e. his judgment between the righteousness and the unrighteous).

Matthew 25:31 (ESV) “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.”

By using the term “**Son of Man**,” Jesus is referring to himself. The disciples have asked him what will be the sign of his second coming and the fact that he has been answering that question helps eliminate any doubt about whom Jesus is speaking. He is talking about his own return. **Son of Man** was Jesus’ favorite self-designation³ and he took the phrase from a vision that God revealed to Daniel.

Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ “I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus is not merely a carpenter from Nazareth. He is one “**like a son of man**” to whom God the Father has handed over an everlasting kingdom. Jesus was humble and lowly when he walked this earth with his disciples, but when he comes again, his true glory will be revealed.

³ Jesus used the term about himself 30 times in Matthew and a total of 80 times in all four gospels.

His Glorious Attendants (v.31)

When Jesus comes again, he will not come alone. He will be surrounded by *his glorious attendants*. He will come in glory "*and all the angels with him*." This now the third⁴ time in this Olivet Discourse that Jesus has mentioned angels being present with him as he describes his second coming and the end of the age. Here, in v.31, he says, "*all the angels*" will be with him. In 24:31 Jesus described the angels as "*his angels*." Jesus clearly teaches his disciples that he is Commander and Chief of "*all the angels*." What breath-taking arrogance if this is not true! What heart-stopping glory if it is!

His Glorious Authority (v.31)

Jesus reveals his *glorious authority*. When Jesus comes in his glory, and all his angels are with him, "*then he will sit on his glorious throne*." Jesus claims that at his return he will not be a humble carpenter from Nazareth, but rather a royal Son seated on a throne. Jesus will reign while seated on a throne exercising sovereign authority. The fact of his authority is clarified as Jesus the details explains further because he moves on from the describing himself as the "Son of Man" (v.31) to referring to himself as "*the King*" (v.34). Kings sit on thrones. Jesus is THE King of kings and this fact will be revealed at his second coming. When kings sit on thrones, they exercise their authority. Jesus' glorious authority is revealed as we see him seated on a glorious throne. This brings us to the burden of this passage; the judgment that will be given by this glorious King seated on his glorious throne.

His Glorious Assessment (v.32-45)

Jesus gives the majority of his attention in this passage to the *glorious assessment* he will exercise while seated on his glorious throne. This is glorious because this assessment is right and good. He blesses those who are righteous and he curses those who are unrighteous. The scene is set up for us in vs.32-33.

Before him will be gathered all the nations (v.32). Jesus will be the judge of "*all nations*." He is the one appointed by God to judge all of humanity. Jesus is not merely a Jewish prophetic teacher. He is a global King, a universal Judge. He is the One to whom God has handed over all judgment. The apostle Paul said this well.

Acts 17:30-31 (ESV) ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Every human being will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10).

⁴ Matthew 24:31, 36.

He will separate people one from another (v.32). Jesus is one person who decides the eternal destiny of the souls whom he created. The truth is that all religions do not lead to everlasting life. All roads do not lead to salvation, but rather to separation. The focal point of this separation of one people from another is on the person of Jesus. He and he alone is the who will separate one people from another. How one chooses to respond to Jesus in this life, is the most important decision any person will ever make.

He will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left (v.33). The right hand is always the hand of favor while the left is the one of disfavor. The right refers to blessing while the left refers to cursing. In biblical culture sheep were always favored over goats because of the wool they produced. Clothing could be made of sheep's wool, which could be harvested annually, while goats did not provide such a benefit. Therefore, sheep were preferred over goats.

The Blessing of Righteousness (vs.34-40)

The King turns his attention first to those who are blessed. These represent those who are righteous (v.37).

Matthew 25:34 (ESV) Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

The King will say. We have already noted that Jesus is speaking about himself. This is the only place that I can think of in Scripture where Jesus explicitly refers to himself as King. Here in the privacy of this conversation with his disciples, he reveals to them who he truly is. He is King.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father. The King has a Father. So far in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has used the phrase "**my Father**," ten times.⁵ In every instance it does not refer to Joseph, but rather to God the Father "**who is in heaven**."⁶ This of course is Jesus speaking about God Almighty, the heavenly Father. God the Father has blessed these to whom Jesus is speaking. The goodness and grace of God the Father is upon them. Therefore, King Jesus, invites them to **come** to him.

Inherit the kingdom. To inherit something is "to receive a possession or benefit as a gift from someone who has died, generally a parent."⁷ The kingdom into which they are being invited to come is a kingdom they **inherit**, not one they have **earned**! This kingdom is given to them as a **gift**, not something they have achieved because of their own effort. This kingdom is a gift to them because of the work of **someone else died** and then gave them this great, gracious gift **after** their death. This glorious kingdom is all grace and no merit, or earned effort. This

⁵ Matthew 7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19; 20:23.

⁶ Matthew 7:21; 10:32-33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19.

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 572.

kingdom is a gift, not the result of due wages. This kingdom is a kingdom inherited, not earned! This great and glorious King is inviting them into a gracious gift, not giving them wages they have earned. This kingdom is given to them as a gift, not because it is something they earned or deserve or have any right to demand. This glorious inheritance is given as gracious gift that comes to them at the expense of someone else's life. These disciples listening to this message will soon discover that it will be the death of this King with whom they are conversing.

Prepared for you from the foundation of the world. The proof that they did not earn this kingdom is further advanced because it was *"prepared for them before the foundation of the world."* The Father planned this kingdom before any of them had even done anything good or bad. This great and glorious kingdom was planned in the mind of the Creator before he ever spoke the first creative command. The gracious kingdom to be given as an inheritance, was in the mind of God before he laid the foundation of the world. Here we see the awesome, wonderful, and humbling doctrine of election.

Ephesians 1:3-6 (ESV) ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

God the Father and Jesus the Son were at work together, before the foundation of this world, planning and preparing a kingdom to manifest their glorious grace to all who they chose to invite into their glorious kingdom of kindness, love, and generosity. Blessed are those who today will hear this invitation and accept it! *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"*

The Shock of the Sheep

Notice that these words shock the sheep. They are surprised, not that they were allowed into the kingdom, but because of the stated reason *why* they were welcomed in. Why were these blessed ones allowed to inherit this glorious kingdom? Was it because of their treatment of *all people generally* or was it because of their treatment of *Jesus specifically*? Were they invited into the heavenly kingdom because of what they did to others in general or because of what they did to Jesus in particular? Listen to the words of Jesus.

Matthew 25:35-36 (ESV) ³⁵ "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Clearly the reason these blessed ones are allowed to inherit this glorious kingdom is *because of how they responded to Jesus in particular*. Note the consistent use of first person pronouns, I and me.

Matthew 25:35-36 (ESV) ³⁵ "For I was hungry and you gave **me** food, I was thirsty and you gave **me** drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed **me**, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed **me**, I was sick and you visited **me**, I was in prison and you came to **me**."

The reason these blessed ones are invited into the King's glorious kingdom is *because of how they treated Jesus in particular, not because of how they treated all people in general*. But this statement shocks them because they can't think of a time when they've done to Jesus anything of what he has just described.

Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord when..." They are unaware of any times when they have fed or clothed or welcomed or visited Jesus. They ask him *when* did these things happen about which Jesus has spoken?

Matthew 25:40 (ESV) And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

What these blessed people did to "the least of these my brothers," they were actually doing to Jesus. This is the key to this passage. But who are "the least of these my brothers?" Does Jesus mean all people in general (i.e. any and every human being)? Or does he mean some category more specific than that?

If Jesus means by this all people in general, then the way to get into heaven is by doing good deeds to strangers, feeding those who are hungry, thirsty, and spending a lot of time visiting the sick in hospitals and those who are in prison. Is this what Jesus is teaching?

When you study the Bible and you don't know for sure what a word or phrase means in a particular passage, then step one is to find the definition of the word and then find out where else in Scripture that word is used and what it means in that context.

1) *The meaning of "my brothers."* The Greek word translated '**brothers**' is *adelphos* (ἀδελφός), which can refer to male siblings sharing the same parents or, depending on context, it refer to all siblings within one family, including males and females. This word connotes the meaning of family. 'Family' is a limiting word, not an all-inclusive word.

2) *Where else has Jesus used this language?* Jesus actually answers the question when we look at the first place Jesus used this phrase "my brothers."

Matthew 12:46-50 (ESV) ⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And

stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

The family members of Jesus are those who "***do the will of the Father in heaven.***" What is the "will of the Father in heaven?" Jesus answers that by explaining, "*For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day*" (John 6:40).

The will of God the Father in heaven is to give eternal life to everyone who looks on Jesus in faith and trust. **Not everyone does this.** Not everyone believes that Jesus is the Holy Son of God. Thus not everyone is a member of the family of Jesus.

Spiritual relationship to Jesus is infinitely more important than a biological one. Thus, when Jesus uses the phrase "*the least of these my brothers,*" he means someone who has joined him in doing the will of God the Father. He means those who are following him as his disciples. This phrase *narrows Jesus' meaning away from all people in general and specifically to those who are his disciples and followers.*

Jesus confirms this understanding in what he said to Saul. The young Pharisee Saul hated the disciples of Jesus. He stood by as they were murdered, he threatened them, beat them, tried to make them blaspheme, and even violently pursued Jesus' disciples into various cities. Until he personally met Jesus face to face and heard these words,

Acts 9:4-5 (ESV) ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

In persecuting and abusing Christians, Saul was persecuting and abusing Jesus. To ***attack a disciple of Jesus is to attack Jesus himself.*** Paul's understanding of the church (i.e. the disciples of Jesus) being the body of Christ, came from these words.

One final piece of evidence that proves Jesus is referring to his disciples when using the phrase, "my brothers," is found in the final use of this exact phrase in Matthew's gospel. After his resurrection, Jesus met the two Mary's and told them, "***...go tell my brothers...***" (Mt 28:10) that he was alive. In the context it is indisputable that he meant his disciples.

The truth is that every true disciple of Jesus receives the Holy Spirit of Jesus. If you do not have the Holy Spirit of Jesus dwelling within you, then you are not part of the family of Jesus (Rom 8:9). ***Everyone in whom the Spirit of Jesus dwells is a member of family of Jesus, the body of Jesus Christ.*** Thus, whatever you do (or don't do) to those who bear the name of Christ, you do (or don't do) to Christ himself. To welcome a Christian is to welcome Christ himself. To feed a Christian is to feed Christ himself. To offer a drink to a Christian is to offer a drink to Christ himself. To clothe or visit a Christian in hospital or prison is to

clothe or visit Christ himself. **How you treat even the most insignificant Christian is how you treat Jesus himself.** Jesus said,

Matthew 10:40 (ESV) "Whoever receives you receives me..."

The reason these sheep were shocked by the words of the King is because they were *not the kind of people who lived their lives trying to impress important people*. They were the kind of people whose hearts had been so transformed by the love of Jesus that they loved and cared for anyone who bore his name. They were so devoted to Jesus that they expressed that devotion to even the least of Jesus' disciples. They loved Jesus and everyone attached to Jesus and for that love they were invited to inherit a glorious kingdom that had been prepared for them from the very foundation of the world.

Summary: How a person responds to Jesus—and his body (i.e. his disciples, his followers), is the deciding factor of one's eternal destiny. If one loves Jesus—and all who bear his name, then one will be welcomed into the kingdom of eternal blessing. But the converse is also true. If one hates Jesus—and his body, then an eternal curse awaits.

The Cursing of the Unrighteousness (vs.41-45)

We've seen the blessing that will come to the righteous, now we see the curse that will come to the unrighteous.

Matthew 25:41 (ESV) "Then he will say to those on his left, Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Here we see a similar but opposite judgment. Whereas those on the right were blessed by the Father and invited into a pleasantly prepared kingdom, these on the left are cursed by God and condemned to being cast away into a place of punishment prepared "*for the devil and his angels*."

Notice that whereas the kingdom of heaven was prepared for the people who were blessed, the eternal fire of hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. Hell was not primarily prepared for mankind, but rather first and foremost for the devil and his fallen angels. However, just as the devil rejected the kingdom of the Father and is eternally condemned to hell, so also are all who follow him in that same rejection. Notice also that the primary rejection centers on the person of Jesus.

Matthew 25:42-43 (ESV) ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Clearly the reason these cursed ones are not allowed to inherit this glorious kingdom is *because of what they have NOT done to Jesus*. Note the consistent use of first person pronouns, I and me.

Matthew 25:42-43 (ESV) ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave **me** no food, I was thirsty and you gave **me** no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome **me**, naked and you did not clothe **me**, sick and in prison and you did not visit **me**.'

The reason these cursed ones are NOT invited into the King's glorious kingdom is *because of how they responded to Jesus*. But this statement shocks them because they can't think of a time when they've done to Jesus anything of what he has just described.

Matthew 25:44 (ESV) Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'

Note these are the kind of people who *do* seek to impress important people. They confess that if they had know Jesus was around, then they would have gone out their way to help him. But in his absence, their true heart is revealed. Again Jesus bases his judgment upon how these people responded to himself.

Matthew 25:45 (ESV) Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

These cursed and unrighteous people cared nothing for the person of Jesus because they cared nothing for those people who carried the name of Jesus. These who are cursed did not love Jesus for they demonstrated this lack of love by choosing to ignore the people who bore his name, the name of Christian. To reject the people who carry the name of Christ is to reject Christ himself. To hate those who bear the name of Christ is to hate Christ himself.

Christ is God's only Son, therefore to reject Christ is to reject God who sent him. To hate and reject Christians is to hate and reject Christ. To hate and reject Christ is to hate and reject God the Father who sent him to earth. Jesus explained this to his disciples.

Luke 10:16 (ESV) "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

The judgement of King Jesus is just.

Matthew 25:46 (ESV) "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Conclusion

1. **Jesus is a glorious King.** Jesus claims not only to be the “Son of Man,” but he also claims to be the King of the entire created universe. He is the one to whom God the Father has handed over all authority.⁸ Jesus reveals this truth in the privacy of a conversation with his disciples during his lifetime, but after his resurrection and his ascension into heaven, he commanded his disciples to tell this to all nations. Jesus is not a mere prophet or good moral teacher. He is **King** of all kings and **LORD** of all lords. He is the glorious Commander in Chief of all the angels. It will be an eternally fatal mistake to think Jesus is merely a prophet or merely a good moral teacher. He is the Holy Son of God, the resurrected Son of Man, and the reigning King of all the universe.
2. **Jesus is glorious Judge.** Jesus is one human to whom God has entrusted the responsibility of the final judgment of every human being. All nations will one day be gathered before him. Every soul will stand before and given an account of was done with the life He gave them. Jesus and Jesus alone will be the one who decides the eternal destiny of every created individual.
3. **Jesus is gloriously one with his people.** Being a Christian does not mean being born into a particular biological family or merely saying ‘yes’ to a creed or set of doctrinal statements. Being a Christian happens through repentance of sins when a person puts their faith and trust in Jesus for forgiveness of sin and is born again by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit of Jesus by being filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus. That supernatural act by faith unites forever a redeemed sinner into an unbreakable union with Jesus. Thus, what one does to the people of Jesus, one also does to the person of Jesus. When Jesus talks about “the least of these my brothers,” he is referring to all—even the most humble—those who are members of his spiritual family. He is not referring to every person on the planet in general. He is referring specifically to every person united with him through faith in his saving, redeeming work. Jesus is one with his people. Christians are the body of Christ.
4. **Your response to Jesus will determine your destiny.** Entrance into heaven cannot be earned by doing good deeds. Heaven is inherited, not earned. Entrance into heaven comes only by virtue of a person’s relationship with Jesus. An inheritance typically goes to family members. Jesus only allows into his Father’s eternal kingdom those who are members of his family. One becomes member of his family when you choose to love Jesus more than anything or anyone else on earth. Loving him is easy when you learn that he died in order to save you from your sin and give you the gift of life. If you do not love Jesus above all, then you will not enter heaven at all. Jesus knows those who truly love him and those who truly do not. When we each stand before him to give an account of our lives, then will be disclosed the true and deepest secrets of our hearts and what we truly love most.

⁸ Matthew 11:27; 28:18.

5. **Eternity awaits all persons.** Jesus is very clear here that both heaven and hell endure for eternity. It may be pleasant and easy to think of heaven enduring for eternity, but twice in this passage Jesus tells us that hell is also eternal (v.41, 46). He describes it first as “eternal fire” and then as “eternal punishment.” He is crystal clear. Hell is eternal. Being ambiguous about the nature of hell would be unloving. Facing the fact that hell is an eternal place of fiery punishment ought to force us to seriously consider with whom we want to spend eternity. There are two options. Eternity can be spent in the blessed kingdom of King Jesus and his angels or it can be spent in the cursed eternal fire of hell with the devil and his fallen angels. There’s only two options. Which do you chose?

Discussion Questions

1. Is Jesus here claiming that one day he will sit on the throne of the universe judging the eternal destiny of all people?
2. Is he claiming to possess secret knowledge of God’s plans from before the world was created? What does v.34 reveal about the ancient plans of God?
3. What are the different titles for Jesus used in this passage? What do they reveal about who he is?
4. Is he teaching that doing good deeds is the way to get into heaven? According to this passage, upon what is salvation based?
5. Who does Jesus have in mind when referring to “the least of these my brothers?”
6. Is hell really a place of eternal punishment? Why or why not?
7. Is heaven really a place of eternal life? Why or why not?
8. How would you summarize this portion of Jesus’ teaching?