

The Sheep and Goats Judgment

Have you ever listened to the defense offered by one of your kids as they tried to explain what they did and drew your conclusion too fast? What parent has not done this at least occasionally? And the result is often having to eat our words along with a large slice of humble pie. Unfortunately, we too often do the same with scripture. We read or hear one word, it triggers a pre-conceived and well-entrenched thought and a conclusion is drawn without further study. Such is often the case with this text about Jesus judging the sheep and goats.

For the overwhelming part of Christendom the judgment of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 represents the great and final judgment at the end of time. They believe the sheep go to heaven, the goats go to hell, the world is destroyed and that ends it all. Many connect it with the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20:11. And some even believe they will not know if they are saved or lost until then.

At least one reason this happens is people often hear only one word, judgment, and their listening stops right there. At that moment they believe they know what Jesus is saying based upon their limited understanding of the word judgment. If the time, place, reasons and participants in this text can be clearly identified the entire Olivet Discourse will come alive with its intended meaning. This famous teaching session Jesus had with His disciples is found primarily in Matthew 24 and 25, and constitutes Jesus' answer to their questions recorded in Matthew 24:3 .

The time-frame is when Jesus comes in His glory. That is not at the rapture, for then He comes not to the earth to assume His throne, but in the air to take His church out. Jesus is not presently on His throne, but is at the right hand of the Father's throne (Matthew 22:44 ; Mark 16:19). His work there is not that of an earthly sovereign, but as an intercessor (1 Timothy 2:5).

But, Jesus will indeed come in His glory when He will inherit the kingdom His Father has prepared for Him (vs# 34). This is what Gabriel meant when he told Mary her Son would have the throne of His father David (Luke 1:32). This is also the glorious coming of which Zechariah spoke in chapter 14 when he described Messiah as

returning to the Mt. of Olives, bringing His holy ones with Him, and being King of all the earth. Further, this is what John saw in Revelation 19: 11.

Jesus will accomplish a number of things at His second coming. Among those things is the destruction of His enemies as seen in Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19. But, He will also have some judging to do. Who will He judge? Those who survive the tribulation period, both righteous and unrighteous. And that is where the sheep/goats judgment comes into play.

It is very important to note the place of this judgment, for that tells us a lot about the participants. It will take place on earth, not in heaven or some ethereal place about which we know nothing. The nations will be gathered before Him and He, at that time, will be on earth at the beginning of His 1000 year reign from the throne of David. It will not be a judgment of the dead, but of those still alive on earth at the time of His 2nd coming.

Joel refers to this place specifically when he prophesied the judgment will occur in the Valley of Jeshoshaphat (Joel 3:2,12). So, where is this valley? Nobody knows for sure. Since the 4th century the Kidron Valley between the Eastern Gate and the Mt. of Olives has been called the Valley of Jeshoshaphat, but that is only tradition. Many scholars believe Joel simply meant an ideal place for judgment. The exact place, however, is not of consequence, for the point is that it is on earth, in Israel and quite probably in the vicinity of Jerusalem since that is the place of David's throne.

The sheep nations will be on Jesus' right and the goats on His left. Once the division has been made He will make a pronouncement regarding their eternal destinies and the reasons for those destinies. At the conclusion of the legal proceedings the sheep will be given eternal life and the goats will have earned eternal punishment.

In the Matthew 25 text we are given several reasons for what will happen. The sheep will take care of Jesus' brethren by providing them with food, drink, protection, clothing, friendship and encouragement. The goats quite simply will do nothing for them. In answer to a question both groups will ask on that day, Jesus will say that whatever was done or not done to His brethren was done or not done to Him. In essence all the goats will have to do to earn condemnation is stand by and do

nothing. Sins of omission will carry responsibility just as those of commission. No overt persecution necessary. Just do nothing. Interesting.

But, who are the brethren? The church is in heaven during the tribulation and thus could not possibly be the "brethren". Further, the church comes with Jesus at His 2nd coming and will witness these proceedings. The fact of the matter is that His brethren are the Jews who will be hunted down, persecuted and killed by anti-Christ during the tribulation. The Jews will be desperate for any kind of protection they will be able to find, but only certain people will afford them help, and those people and nations are here called the sheep. Those who gave provision and protection to the Jews during the Nazi era would be akin to the sheep nations of the tribulation.

So, Jesus considers those Jews as His brethren? Yes, in the same way Paul referred to the Jews of his day as his brethren (Romans 9:3-5). Though many in the church (generic term, of course) are hard-pressed to even think about it, yet the truth is that Jesus is not only a Jew, but in a manner of speaking He is the Chief Jew. That means Jews everywhere in every dispensation are His brethren humanly speaking. That does not mean any Jew will be saved on that basis, but it does emphasize the physical, blood-relationship between Jesus the Jew and every other Jew. That is a bitter pill to swallow for anti-Semites, but it is the truth nonetheless.

Joel gives us more criteria that will be used in that judgment (3:1-3). Look carefully at that text and see how American political leadership had better sit up and take note! God will pronounce horrific judgment upon those nations that forced Israel into the horrible injustice of the so-called "land for peace" deals. One of the often-missed yet very real aspects of this event is Jesus' personal involvement on "behalf of My people and My inheritance Israel". God takes it very personal when nations and individuals practice hatred toward His people and take away their land.

There is something else we must not miss in all this. Not only will national policy be judged, but so will personal actions. Just as the old, "I was only taking orders" defense at Nuremburg was soundly rejected by the best legal minds of the world at that time, so, too, will that same excuse fall flat in the face of Jesus Christ, the Judge from whom no motive or deed can ever be hidden.

The time frame of these events regarding the treatment of the Jews, good or bad, is the seven year tribulation that will come upon the earth very soon after the rapture. There will be multitudes left behind. Some will know what has happened, others will not. Many will not care one way or the other, and will just be glad to be rid of the Christians. Those who know the truth, or who will come to know the truth, will have decisions to make that are life-and-death in consequence. To take the mark of the beast and thus become an enemy of God and His people will be to sign one's own certificate of judgment to eternal punishment. To accept Christ in those days, to refuse the mark, to make provision for all who might come for help is to sign one's own certificate of physical death at the hands of the anti-Christ and his minions. One thing that will make this decision so difficult is the fact that it will impact a person's entire family. Excruciating cannot possibly describe the emotional and mental anguish for some during those dark days.

The reason for this judgment is both ancient and clear. Its roots go all the way back to God's foreign policy statement given in Genesis 12:3 , And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse (NASB). This has never been revoked or voided by God.

That does not mean, however, that everything the Jewish people have done is right, good, godly, etc. As a nation they are in rebellion toward God this very moment, and this side of Zechariah 14 they will not accept Jesus as their Messiah as a people. Yet, God will bring them around. Though 66% of them will die in the process, yet that remnant will one day recognize Jesus as their Messiah. And, it is this that God is working toward with steadiness of hand and purpose of heart because, like us, He loves them and will not renege on even a single promise He has made regarding their final redemption.

For fear of being misunderstood, it must be said that God loves all people to the same degree. The mostly Gentile church, the Lord's bride, is His beloved and is in no way any less loved than Israel. The church has a very special place in God's plan and will enjoy the place of honor at Jesus' side for all eternity. However, regarding Israel and the Jews, for anyone to cause them suffering, to deliver them up to their enemies, to take away their land, to refuse aid and comfort to them is totally, absolutely and completely an act of full-blown rebellion against God Himself and He

will not stand for it. Just as their redemption is His business alone, so is their punishment. In short, God has warned the Gentile world, in context of the nations, “do not touch the apple (pupil) of His eye” (Zechariah 2:8).

The sheep/goats judgment makes clear this truth that is not only foreign to unbelievers, but is often ignored by most in Christianity. Though the cross of Jesus is far different from the judgment of Jesus, yet they share something in common, and that is passion. The only thing that equals in passion to God’s love, grace and mercy toward all who come to Him is His fury, wrath and judgment toward all who hate His people Israel. The vast majority of pew-sitters have never heard this because it is this very message that is overwhelmingly missing from pulpits every Sunday. It is not a politically and socially correct text, especially in churches that believe the church has taken the place of Israel in God’s plan.

As unbiblical as it is, yet the avoidance and/or mishandling of this text does make the preaching business a lot easier, you see. Feel-good, prosperity-preaching, social justice championing, emergent preachers only need to keep dishing out their standard three-steps-to-whatever kinds of sermons and everything will remain OK. What God thinks and says about Israel and the Jews is never mentioned. The rock-star preachers leave their pulpits feeling good about themselves, their adoring fans leave their pews feeling good about themselves, you’re OK, I’m OK, everybody is OK so let’s go have lunch. And, as they are lulled into their Sunday afternoon naps the pew-sitters are thinking, “Wow! What a preacher!”, and the preacher is thinking, “Wow! What a way to make a living!”

The sheep/goats judgment of Matthew 25 is not the last judgment Jesus will execute, for the Great White Throne judgment will occur just before the eternal state of things as seen in Revelation 20: 11. Yet, it is one of great importance. Remember the words of the Psalmist, Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you (122:6)

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