

Bible Class The Parable of the Sheep & Goats**Matthew 25:31-46****16th September '24**

Once again, this parable is a continuation on a theme, of the time of judgement at the time of the end, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The verses for study can be split into three sections:

- 1) The separation of the sheep and goat types v31-34
- 2) The description of the behaviour of the righteous v 35-40
- 3) The description of the behaviour of the unrighteous v41-46

The Lord Jesus describes his coming again to earth, his return – just as earlier in

- chapter 24:42-51: the return of the Lord as a thief, to judge his servants
- 25:10: the Bridegroom coming at midnight, to find some unprepared
- 25:19: the return of the Lord of the servants to begin a time of reckoning

31 *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:*

32 *And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats:*

33 *And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

There are two schools of thought in understanding these words of the Lord Jesus.

- 1) That Jesus is describing the judgement of the nations as opposed to the judgement of the Ecclesia and those Resurrected to judgement. That there are two types of nations those who help and bless the Jews or those who are enemies of the Jews and curse them. This point of view is suggested by Brother Thomas in Eureka chapter 14 Section 6 (page 42 Vol 5 of Brown copies)
- 2) That Jesus is describing the general time of judgement of the Ecclesia, and those resurrected. This is suggested by Bro Roberts in Nazareth Revisited page 437. He argues that it cannot refer to nations as it cannot be said of them: that they are heirs of a *kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (25:34)*

Can it be understood in both ways?

Let us have a closer look.

The Lord Jesus qualifies the understanding by supplying context.

First, he describes when this event will occur, and second, that the outcome of the judgement depends upon behaviour towards *the least of these my brethren*.

When it will occur: *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations...*

An order is presented here:

- 1) Come in his glory
- 2) Sit on throne
- 3) All nations gathered before him

The Lord Jesus in his previous parables describes his second coming as like a thief. Or in a situation where people are unprepared, or that there are those who are watching and some who are not. Certainly not as one coming in glory.

What is the glory of the Lord Jesus?

The glory of Jesus, is in fact, the reflection of the glory of the Father – Hebrews 1:1-3: *God, ...Has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, ... Who being the brightness of his glory...* The Lord Jesus was the Word made flesh, but now is Spirit, eternal, the manifestation of the Father, the revelation of the character of Yahweh.

But the manifestation of God is not complete in Jesus, in that the purpose of God in Him is unfulfilled. It is the purpose of God to call out a people for His Name. The Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Anointed, Saviour and Ruler is perfected in those he is Saving and over those he has Ruled, as he has been anointed to a Priest and King to them.

The Glory of Jesus is in those whom the Father has given to him. John 17:5,6.

The Glory that will accompany the Lord Jesus, are those who are made Holy Messengers, or Holy Angels. (Angels means messengers we recall. They are the many who are made as One, manifesting the glory of the unity of the Father in a Multitude. The Purpose of God: Yahweh Elohim: I will be Mighty Ones.

- See Colossians 3:4 *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*
- Hebrews 2:10: *For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory,*
- Ephesians 1:18: *...that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,*
- See also Romans 9:23.

The Lord Jesus describes the important event, as his Coming again, - not as a thief, unseen, and as a surprise to many, but instead coming in glory, manifest, obvious, as what is glory if it is not seen?

Coming in glory, *with the holy angels*, those who have been separated, made holy, messengers who are ones to be sent with a message.

Read Revelation 14, Jesus explains in this chapter how there will be a great assembly of all those judged righteous (of those responsible to judgement through the knowledge of the gospel, who have been resurrected from the dead) described as those redeemed from among men. *They are without fault before the throne of God* (v5). They sing together giving glory to him on the throne (v3). They have been perfected and share in the glory Jesus is speaking of in Matthew 25. In Revelation 14, Jesus explains that there will then be a huge work of preaching – that his Holy Angels, his glorified Saints, will preach the everlasting gospel to all nations ... *having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come* (v6,7)

A further judgement (as opposed to the judgement of the responsible resurrected) is to take place on the nations, and we read Babylon is fallen (v8)

It is as if Revelation 14 is a detailed exposition of Matthew 25:31

It appears therefore that in this parable there is a distinct difference from the previous parables, whereby there was a focus on the need for preparation, awareness, alertness and watching. This parable is about consequences.

In this parable, Jesus appears in glory, before all, there is no secret appearing before the unexpectant, this time he is seated upon the throne, surrounded by helpers.

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats:

How does a shepherd divide his sheep from the goats?

Because of their similarities, in the Levant area, sheep and goats even today are often led about in flocks together. At certain times it becomes necessary to separate the goats from the sheep despite the fact they are looked after by the same shepherd. This is because they do not graze well together and so it frequently becomes necessary to keep them apart from the sheep while they are grazing. A Baptist preacher by the name of John Broadus described what he saw on in travels in Palestine when he visited there in the 1870s: *he reported seeing a shepherd leading his flock of white sheep and black goats all mingled together. when he came to a valley after leading them across the plain of Sharon he turned around and faced his flock he then says when the sheep came up, he tapped it with his long staff on the right side of the head and it quickly moved off to his right; a goat he tapped on the other side and it went to his left.* No doubt this practice has been in operation for centuries and observed by the Lord Jesus in the pastures of Galilee.

The Lord Jesus said that when he sits upon his throne, all nations will be gathered before him and will be separated just like the illustration described.

Some suggest that this does not mean all nations, but people of all nations as in Matthew 28:19 *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* It wasn't nations that were baptised, but individuals within every nation. So we can see in the same way, Jesus could be referring to individuals within all nations in this Matthew 25:32 as well.

But it must be remembered that the Lord Jesus describes in this parable that he is seated upon a throne, with the Holy angels, and in glory. The throne Jesus sits upon, is the throne of his father David, and is over the promised inheritance of the land of Israel, - the Kingdom of God. Jesus will not sit on his throne until after he has judged the righteous and unrighteous who have been resurrected, and he will not take the throne until he has saved his people Israel. He will not save his people Israel after the flesh until he has saved Israel after the Spirit.

Therefore Jesus cannot be referring to the judgement of the saints, who have been called and baptised from every nation, instead it is another general judgement of the nations, - as described in Revelation chapters 14, and 17.

This same judgement on the nations is described in Psalm 2, also in Joel 3:1-2: 3 *For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.*

It is also the assembling of nations is described in Isaiah 60... 3 *And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising...the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.* This chapter describes nations that are compliant – describing them as sheep... *All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of*

Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.

Revelation 17 describes nations that are not compliant, but defiant...

12-14: And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

It is not a surprise to see these nations associated with horns.

Goats have horns. Some sheep do too, it is admitted, nice curly ones though used for trumpets.

We recall it was the goat power which overcame the ram power in Daniel 8:20-21.

Goats have a tendency to go feral, return to the wild, and leave their domestication behind, and can fend for themselves, and do not have the same need for a leader or protector. In the breeding season, rams can be quite aggressive, and challenge one another to a butting competition. However, goats are far more ready to push with their heads, and are of course more dangerous with their forward pointing horns.

The horn nations of Revelation have been the territory of the Beast, and have been happy for many centuries to be a host to the Beast.

Why will the Lord Jesus separate these different nations?

The separation between sheep and goats is based upon one decisive issue: the way in which those being judged have treated the brothers of Jesus; that is, the Jewish people.

All nations will be drawn to Jerusalem to battle. As Zechariah 14:2,3 makes clear, and the Lord will fight against them.

As v35 – 40 makes clear those who have provided some protection to the Jews and are against the invasion of the Holy land will be permitted to exist in the Kingdom of God - the *kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*:

Has the Kingdom of God been prepared for the obedient nations of the world? From the foundation of the world? The world is in Greek cosmos, or the order of things, that is the epoch of the Jews. The nation of Israel was uniquely chosen in the first place to be an example to the rest of the nations. He chose the nation in fulfillment of promises to the fathers, in order that all the world would be *filled with his glory as the waters cover the sea...* see Isaiah 11:9. Habakkuk 2:14.

So yes, the Kingdom of God – Israel has been prepared for the benefit of the Gentiles from the very outset.

Psalm 72:10,11 shows how many nations will bow and comply with the ultimatum from Jerusalem – the same ones who have continuously vetoed or abstained from the UN Resolutions condemning Israel, and who attempt to push back against virulent antisemitism.

Many passages of Scripture make it clear that at the close of this age there will be world-wide hostility toward the Jewish people and the state of Israel. Not only will there be a concentrated attack by the Gentile nations against Israel, but Jews in other countries will be subjected to various forms of persecution. In the midst of all this, however, there will be some Gentiles who take their stand – either as individuals or as nations – on the side of the Jewish people. These will do everything in their power to protect the Jews and to alleviate their suffering. At the ensuing judgement, this will mark them out as sheep, counted worthy to enter into Christ's kingdom established on earth.

Alternative understanding

Does this mean that the following verses 34-46 do not apply to the present condition and within the Ecclesia?

Of course not.

As with many of the parables of Jesus there are multi layers, and many lessons to be drawn from it. Those who see suffering in others, and the needs of others, and see that help is required and freely offer and give it, those who are not prejudiced and biased, and go out of their way to sacrifice their time and effort and energy for the well-being of others, this is never wasted, but is no different as if we were doing it for the Lord himself - Ephesians 6:6-7: *Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord...*

On the other hand those who allow prejudice, and bias to enter into their minds, who are not quick to forgive, and who look the other way when they see or hear of need in others, or do not sacrifice their own time, effort or energy for the benefit of others – especially within the Fellowship, then they will also be rejected at the time of judgement.

As with nations who refuse to comply to the law issued from Zion, who will lose their identity, and will be suffer greatly as a result of the sufferings they have imposed upon whom they regard as the least among men... so will any and all who behave in such a way, even among those who are called to be saints.

41 *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil [slanderer, false accuser] and his angels [messengers]:* The greatest liar is the leaders of false religion which has deceived millions – the chief of which is the Pope with his pagan trinity, and hundreds of thousands

of corrupt priests. Any who profess true religion and undefiled, and who do not keep it are ultimately members of the cohort of the devilish thinking.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Brother Terry