

READING

Matthew 25:31-46

FOCUS SPOT 1

Sorting out the Sheep from the Goats

The reading tells us one major thing – there will be no middle ground. Verse 32

“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” (Matthew 25:32-33 NIV)

Just before we go on, notice one thing that has significance, especially for past generations. The sheep, the good guys and gals are put on the right, but the bad people, the goats, are put on the left. This is perhaps where the left-hander being more devious than the right-handed person. The left-hander was thought to be inferior. Of course there is also the Latin that right was Dextra and left was Sinistra. The significance of left and right is zero, it is just dividing the sheep and the goats

But we move on. When Jesus returns and this Judgement Day begins there will be no sitting on the fence, no middle ground. What excuses do people make nowadays, not to become Christians? They sit on the fence.

- I’m still looking into it.
- I’m waiting until I am a bit older.
- I think all religions are good; I’m still waiting to decide.
- Just being good is the way to heaven.

Is that last one true?

Let us look at verse 35, words to the sheep, the blessed ones

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:35-36 NIV)

And also verse 42 – words to the goats – the cursed ones

“For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.” (Matthew 25:42-43 NIV)

Surely this is salvation by philanthropy? All you have to do is be nice to people and help people and you will get to heaven. So it doesn’t matter what religion, what faith you follow, because God sees your heart

How would you answer a non-Christian if they said

All you have to do is be nice to people and help people and you will get to heaven. So it doesn’t matter what religion, what faith you follow, because God sees your heart

But salvation by philanthropy goes against our evangelical tradition and thinking. Did Paul get it wrong when he says

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no-one can boast.”
(Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

Paul talks about grace and no amount of works saving us, but Jesus, or is it Matthew says that good works does save us. Dilemma. If it is Matthew and not Jesus, then we have real problems with all the gospels. We can dismiss them all if the words reported to have been spoken by Jesus, weren't. Even if some of them weren't because then we cannot know for sure about any of them. So Jesus must have said these words reported by Matthew that we have read.

So it must be Paul that is wrong because Jesus can never be wrong. But then if Paul is wrong about this, then his bits of the Bible, i.e. the letters what he wrote cannot be as he says

“... God-breathed and...useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV)

So we discard a lot of the New Testament in that case, and as Paul wrote that statement, then the rest of the Bible is also suspect!

This cannot be so – so there must be some other reason for Jesus to have said this. There is a clue in the passage. It is to miss. It is found in verses 40 and 45

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:40 NIV)

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’” (Matthew 25:45 NIV)

It is our relationship with other Christians - **one of the least of these brothers of mine** – not the general population. Therefore it is a matter of relationship – how you as a person treat a Christian. If you listen and believe and have a relationship with Jesus, then fine and you are saved. Note in verse 45, it is not what they do to Christians – it is what they do not do that is important.

So when Judgement Day comes, the sheep and the goats will be sorted out.

PRAYER

READING

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

FOCUS SPOT 2 on Judgement

I think that this is one of the most scariest passages of Scripture. In it, it speaks of our works as

- Gold
- Silver
- Costly Stones
- Wood
- Hay
- Straw

What works do you think they are referring to?

Why do I think it is scary? Because it is almost as if our lives are going to look like a building with the six materials we have spoken of and everyone will see them. This is the judgement, we as Christians will have to go through. What does that do for you?

Note though that we will get through, although some of us only by the skin of our teeth. Certainly with no clothes on as they will be burnt up in the fire!

To me it brings home even more that words we have already had this evening, but need to go slightly further. Words from Paul

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV)

God has for us all good works to do – but do we do them? The defence is not that we did not do bad, the only defence is that we did good – bad to the Matthew 25 concept. We can live the Christian life trying to do as little as we can get away with.

- Not helping others
- Not telling other about Jesus
- Not worshipping with others
- Not putting myself out at all
- Not helping others to grow in faith
- Etc, etc.

But God calls us to be wholehearted and

- Putting ourselves out to help others
- Telling others people about Jesus
- Going to church to worship with others
- Attending a housegroup and helping others to grow
- Etc, etc.

Which list do you think is gold, silver and costly stones, and which is wood, hay and straw? Which do you want to present to Jesus when you are in heaven?

What is the reward spoken of in verse 14? I am not sure, but just to hear Jesus say, ‘Well done my good and faithful servant’ will be enough.

PRAYER