

As we open our Bibles this morning to Matthew 25, we find ourselves at two critical points in our walk with Jesus. The *first critical point* is within the text itself, as we still find ourselves on the Wednesday of the last week of Jesus’ life on earth. And Jesus is still on the grounds of the Temple, and he is still standing before the religious leaders, his disciples and the great crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. And he is still asking hard questions, and rebuking and warning those who claimed to love and honor and live for God, but who loved and honored and lived themselves instead. And today we see, after giving warnings to all about the judgement of God they would someday face when he returns, Jesus *now clearly lays out the standards of God by which they will be judged.*

The *second critical point* we face in our walk with Jesus today is that in Matthew 25 Jesus changes the target of his warnings *to those of us here today* - and to all who claim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Now there are some of us who claim Christ who say these warnings are not for us. You know - *once saved, always saved!* Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Well, that’s part of it, most of it, but not all of it. That’s not what Jesus says in our text for today. The text we are reading today is Jesus’ words; 1/3 of it about the Final Judgement. And Jesus says salvation is more than just about faith. A warning today – if you are easily offended, be prepared to be offended. Jesus offended people to wake them to who he truly is. You also could be encouraged today. Buckle up! Our walk will a bit rocky this morning but it’ll be worth it.

Let’s start with a question. An important question - the most important question that we are confronted with this morning. The good news is that the gospel of Jesus Christ does provide the answer to the question. The bad news about the good news is that although we may think we understand that answer, we most likely don’t. At least not fully. This morning we need to think more broadly and deeply about this fundamental question, so that the choices we make will be consistent with what it truly means to have faith in Jesus and what it means to follow Christ. The question is: *“What do we have to do to get to heaven?”* Most of us would agree that’s an important question. What do we have to do, so that once our lives on earth are finished, we will be joyfully admitted into to glory of heaven with God rather than the eternal pain of hell?

Well, if you are an alert, informed, born-again, evangelical Christian - who has been paying attention on Sundays and at Bible studies here at Arrowsmith, you are probably thinking: *“We can’t DO anything to get to heaven! We cannot earn our way to heaven. That’s true. The Bible tells us that none of us is good enough. None of us meets God’s standard because He is a holy God and His requirement is holiness; which for us is moral perfection - and none of us meets that standard. The apostle Paul wrote: “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10) and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Psalm 130:3 declares: “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” Not us. No one, in light of our universal sinfulness, can stand before a holy God. And therefore, unless some other provision is made, no one can go to heaven. We are all doomed. That’s bad news, really bad news and none of us are not an exception to the rule. According to God’s holy standard, “None is righteous.”*

But there is good news. And that good news is that, although we cannot earn our way to heaven, we don’t have to. Jesus Christ has done it on our behalf. Through faith, his worth and holiness are imputed to us, that is, credited to our account. His perfect obedience to God is viewed as if it were ours. And our sin, likewise, is transferred to him. That’s why Christ had to die on a cross in our place. To pay the penalty, not for his own sin, but for ours. The apostle Paul wrote: *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).* Yes, we are transformed from sinner to saint through the cross and the blood of Christ. In Ephesians 2:8-9 the apostle Paul tells us that: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* But then, in the next verse he writes: *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* What does *“good works”* mean? If our salvation is by faith in Christ alone, *what we do*, should reflect that.

And so how does *what we do* relate to Jesus' final judgement and whether we go to heaven? Jesus answers that question by telling us two more parables before continuing his description of the judgment that will occur at his second coming in Matthew 25:31-46. Both parables contain both a blessing and curse. Both parables are encouragements to those who are faithful and ready, and warnings to those who are not. This is not a new theme for Jesus. He has often given strong warnings to false teachers and false prophets – and strong warnings to those that claim to be followers of God, but who are really false-followers. False professions of faith are serious, and even more so because of the self-deception that is part of them. Jesus' first parable is set in the occasion of a Jewish wedding.

A Jewish marriage of that time consisted of three parts. The first part is what we might call the marriage *arrangement* or the *engagement*. This was done between the fathers of the man and the woman who were to be married. The second part in the marriage process was the *betrothal*. This was a legal union brought about by the exchange of marriage vows between the bride and groom before family members and the dowry being given for the bride. During a period of betrothal, the bride would prepare herself to become the wife of the groom, and the groom would prepare a home in which to receive his bride. After the period of betrothal came the third part - the *wedding ceremony*. The festivities of the wedding day would begin with the groom arriving at the home of the bride, during which a wedding ceremony would occur. And the ceremony would culminate in a wedding feast in the home of the groom—along with his new bride—later that evening. And the journey from the bride's family to the home that the groom had prepared for her, would involve "the wedding procession" - which was a very public event, to which the entire community would come to witness it together.

Now the Jewish wedding procession was usually led by ten unmarried women. They played a very important part because the procession would occur in the evening, and they were to stand at certain points along the pathway and be ready for the coming of the bridegroom from the home of the bride. They were given long poles, with a lamp at the top that contained wicks soaked with oil for burning. And they were to wait and listen for the call, "*Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!*" And then, they were to join the procession and light the way for the groom, his new bride, and all the family and their friends, as they made their way to the wedding feast. Their single task was to watch and be ready for the call that announced the coming of the bridegroom and light the way, after the call came.

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Matthew 25:1-13

In context of this verse, we can see that Jesus used this parable to illustrate the theme of the parable that he had presented at the end of Matthew 24 regarding living for Jesus and being ready for Jesus return. In fact, notice that Jesus introduces it in verse 1 by saying, "*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps . . .*" Jesus concludes the parable in verse 13 stating the same thing he said in 24:42 & 44. The 10 virgins, these 10 young unmarried women, attend the bride and lead the wedding procession according to Jewish custom. The significance of there being 10 virgins is simply that it was the customary number of bridesmaids. All seem to be alike at first. Each one had their pole and lamp. Each of the ten came for the same purpose of leading the bridegroom in his procession.

The outward appearance of the women was the same, but inwardly they were different. Our text says five were foolish and five were wise. In the same way, those of us professing to be God's people have always been a mixture of foolish and wise. The foolish are mentioned first because the parable places the emphasis upon them and the consequences to them. The foolishness of the first five is contrasted with the wise right from the beginning. They did not bring extra oil for their lamps while the wise did. No reason is indicated other than that they were foolish. The fact is that *in their foolishness they did not prepare properly*. They were waiting to join the wedding procession without having enough oil for their lamps. The wise, on the other hand, are properly prepared and ready with a flask of oil if needed.

Next, the parable tells us that for some unknown reason the bridegroom was delayed. Speculation on why he was delayed is insignificant. The ten bridesmaids knew that he would come that night, they just did not know at what hour. From our perspective, Jesus has delayed a long time in returning, yet he knows exactly why. He does not have to explain it to us while we wait. He has given us enough warning and information to know that we are to be prepared and be ready for him at whatever hour he does finally come. And that, brothers and sisters, is our assignment too. We are to watch and be ready. Few of us give much thought at all to preparing for the Lord Jesus' glorious return. We're too often occupied with other things that we think are more important. But Jesus tells us that our whole lives are to be to live in a constant state of readiness for him - watching and waiting and being ready.

Then Jesus tells us all ten women eventually grew drowsy and fell asleep. No condemnation is given to either the foolish or the wise for sleeping. What this detail does add to the text is that the foolish had more than ample time to prepare themselves. They found time to sleep during the delay, but they neglected to get the needed oil. Perhaps they had some false belief that when the time came they would get the needed oil from somewhere. Perhaps they were just procrastinators. Whatever the reason, they squandered their time sleeping instead of making the necessary preparations. But the five wise maids could rest quietly in confident assurance that when the bridegroom arrived, they were already ready.

Such is the case today, for there are many that claim to be part of the church, the body of Christ here on earth, but they are self-deceived and quietly rest in the false assurance that they are prepared to meet Jesus. We would like to think that if they only knew their dilemma, they would quickly prepare themselves. But like the five foolish bridesmaids in the parable, it is obvious they are not ready, and they do not recognize it. May God uses these words today to awaken their hearts and souls. We read as the ten are sleeping, suddenly the announcement comes: *"Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him"* The moment had come. They grab their lamps, ready to join the wedding procession and the festivities that will follow. Only then does the foolishness of the first five become apparent to all. They are low on oil and a wick without oil will not stay lit. Quickly they beg the wise to give them some of their oil, but they have only brought enough for their own needs. But there is not enough to share - "Hurry" the wise say, *"Go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves."* The five foolish virgins left to purchase oil, but while they were gone the bridegroom arrived. The five wise virgins joined the wedding procession, arrived at the place of the wedding feast, and the doors were shut behind them.

In this parable Jesus is again revealing the truth that he will come at a time when people do not expect him. And He will reward the righteous who are wise and judge the unrighteous who are foolish. If you claim to be a follow of Jesus Christ, you must be ready for Him when He comes, for if you are not ready, then you are too late. Brothers and sisters, are you prepared today? Are you ready for Jesus' return? Are you ready to stand before the judgment of God? If you think you are ready, what is the basis for that belief? The five foolish virgins thought they were ready. The self-righteous Pharisees thought they were ready, but Jesus pronounced judgement upon them. In Isaiah 55:6-7 the prophet proclaims: *"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."* If you are not ready, seek Jesus. He is here today!

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Matthew 25:14-18

In this parable Jesus continues to answer the question: How does *what we do* relate to Jesus' final judgement and whether we go to heaven? The context of this parable is given in verse 1. This is also a parable that continues to be about the coming of kingdom of God when Jesus returns – which is now likened to a story of the man and his three servants. It was not unusual for a wealthy man to leave on a business trip and be gone a long time. We don't think the same way about business trips now because we can travel quickly by plane, train, car or motorized boat. In Jesus' day they traveled by horse or foot, and if on water, the boat was powered by sail or oars. While the master would be away, he would entrust his possessions to some of his responsible servants. Such a wealthy man would have several well-educated servants who were very capable of handling his affairs. In fact, it was common for such servants to have a fairly free hand in the areas entrusted to them even when the master was at home.

A quick point here regarding the use of the word “*servant*” in the English Standard Version. Some English versions translate this as “*slave*” in that the original word in the Greek (*doulos*) means “*slave*” or “*bondservant*.” This word could be used literally or figuratively, and could also be seen as being involuntarily or voluntarily; and is almost always qualified in the sense of subjection. The reality of *doulos* is that every true, born-again Christian is a *slave/servant*. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us that we have been bought with a price, purchased with blood of Jesus to be part of the church. In Philippians 3:12 the apostle Paul writes: “*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*” Jesus is our “*master*.” We belong to him!

In the parable we read that part of this man's preparation for his journey was to evaluate his servants and entrust to each one an amount of money according to each servant's ability. The first servant received 5 talents, the second 2 talents, and the third 1 talent. A “*talent*” was a variable unit of weight and money used in ancient Greece, Rome, and the Middle East. In OT times, a talent was a unit of weight equaling about 75 pounds. A “*talent*”, in the sense that Jesus was speaking of it in this parable, was a form of money. In NT times, it was a unit of monetary reckoning (though not an actual coin), valued at about 6,000 drachmas, the equivalent of about 20 years' wages for a laborer. A common laborer earned about one drachma per day. In approximate modern equivalents, if a laborer earns \$15 per hour, at 2,000 hours per year he would earn \$30,000 per year, so a “*talent*” would equal \$600,000. Hence, “5 talents” would have been worth \$3,000,000, 2 worth \$1,200,000 and 1 worth \$600,000.

In the parable Jesus tells us that the first two servants invested what they received and gained a return on their investments. We are not told what kind of investments, but it's not important to the point of the parable. All we need to know is that the first two servants made full use of what their master had given them in order to bring a profit to him. They maximized the opportunity given to them. The third servant simply hid the money in the ground. That was a simple and common method in the ancient world of protecting valuable things from being stolen such as money and jewelry. The third servants' action may have been fear of loss. The master had already evaluated this servant and gave him only one talent, which was still a lot of money whatever it was made of, because that was all he determined this servant could handle. Even so the master would still have had a proper expectation for this servant to do something with the talent and make a profit from it. Instead, the slave simply buried it.

“Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” Matthew 25:19-23

Jesus tells us the first two servants had some pretty good news to tell their master when he returned. Each of them had doubled the talents that had been given to them. There is great emphasis on this excitement in the Greek because the amounts are placed in the emphatic position. What the first one said would be literally translated as, *“Master, five talents you gave to me – see, five talents more gained!”* The second slave says the same thing in the same way regarding his two talents. Both were clearly excited about reporting this to their master. It should be noted that their excitement was not because they expected a big bonus or anything. These men were servants and all that they did belonged to their master. Doing what they had been told to do was simply what was properly expected; it did not earn a reward except at the discretion of the master. As good servants, they would have been excited just to know that they had pleased their master by fulfilling his expectations of them. Each of them received the praise of their master as well as a promotion. Each had been faithful with what they had been given and so they had proven that they could be trusted with even more. That same principle is repeated in other places in scripture as well. In Luke 16:10 Jesus said: *“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.”* Faithfulness in small things will result in the reward of being given more.

“He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’” Matthew 25:24-25

Unlike the first two servants that were excited to see the master return, the third servant is not, for he had not done anything that would please his master and he knows it. So when he is called into account, he begins with an accusation against his master to justify his very lame and untrue excuse. His excuse does not even show any forethought. The master had been away for a long time, but the excuse shows that he did not make any preparation for the day of accountability with either the talent given to him or even thinking up a legitimate reason for what he had done with it. First, he slander’s his master’s character calling him a *“hard”* man. From this Greek word we get our word *“sclerosis”* as in arteriosclerosis – hardening of the arteries. When used of someone’s character, it means to be unrelenting, harsh, merciless, stern, one who exacts more than he has a right to exact.

The servant then tried to back up his accusation by saying his master reaped what he did not sow and gathered what he did not scatter. The insinuation is his master gained unjust profits. The servant is saying something like, *“You are a hard man, and if I lost any of your talent while doing business, you would have demanded it of me anyway. So the only thing I could do was hide the talent so that I would not lose any of it. Look, here is your talent. You should be glad that I returned what is yours.”* The truth was that the master had assessed the ability of each servant and provided what was needed for them to carry out the assigned responsibilities. He was not *“hard”* and neither did he expect unjust gain. He only expected a return on what was invested by each slave. The master had not done anything to produce any kind of fear. The master now confronts him for this accusation and lame excuse.

“But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.’” Matthew 25:26-28

For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 25:29-30

The master uses the servant’s very accusation against him. If the master truly was a hard man and gained unjust profits, then out of that fear the servant should have at least turned the talent over to the bankers - so that there would have been some interest gained from it. The money-changers also acted as the bankers of Israel. They would pay interest on what was deposited with them and then take that money and loan it to others at a higher interest rate. The servant was not afraid, he was unfaithful and lazy – and for that the master brought judgment against him. What had been given to him would be taken away and given to those who had proved themselves to be faithful. The worthless servant would then be thrown out into the outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. The good servant received praise and blessings while the wicked slave received condemnation and punishment.

In the Parable of the Talents Jesus tells us that, because we must give an account to him, we should make productive use of what he entrusts to us *for his glory*. God gives every true born-again Christian gifts, abilities and possessions by which we are to serve God. We are called to be faithful to God in using those gifts. God is not unreasonable to expect a return on what He entrusts to us, for He gives to each according to their ability. God supplies all that is needed, and God gives the increase. All we have to do is be faithful to use what He has given. We possess, but God owns, and so it is not in our own ability we trust, but His ability to do His work through us. We are chosen by God and called by God to apply this kind of faithfulness to Him in every area of our lives. That is what it means to live a life of faith. We trust God to do His will through us as we are faithful to do what He wants us to do.

For the true Christian, there is reward in both the present and the future. God gives to us according to our abilities, and as we prove faithful in smaller things, we are entrusted more important things. We will not be appraised or valued in comparison with each other, but according to our faithfulness to God. Not all true Christians will faithfully live up to the abilities God has given them, and though they will suffer loss, they will still be saved. 1 Corinthians 3:15 speaks of those who’ve wasted their ability, ignored their spiritual gifts and passed up opportunities: *“If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”* This happens when our walk with Jesus doesn’t reflect our talk about Jesus.

And there also others who claim Christ who are tragically unfaithful to God because their faith is false. They are self-deceived into thinking they are even working and serving the kingdom of God, but they are in reality serving themselves in according to their own self-righteousness. In order to truly serve and doing things for Jesus, we must truly know Jesus. Those with a false faith are like those in Matthew 7:21-23 who were doing all sorts of things in Jesus name thinking they were gaining great rewards, but Jesus said to them, *“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”* We do not serve God by doing what we want and what we think is best. We faithfully serve God by doing what God commands in His Word and by obeying what He tells us in His Word by following the will of God we read of in His Word. Jesus said: *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”* (John 15:7-8).

So then - the point of this parable is that throughout our time of waiting for the Lord's return, as long as we live upon this earth, we are to be "good" and "faithful" stewards—servants who, out of love for our Lord, diligently use whatever it may be that He has entrusted to us for His pleasure. We truly "have" what God gives us when we improve what He gives us, and wisely invest what He give us, and causing it to grow for the advancement of His kingdom and His glory; so that when He returns, He is pleased with what we give back to Him from out of what He has first given to us. Are you faithful to God with all that He has given you in life? Our Lord has constantly been stressing to His disciples, with respect to His return can be summed up in two words: "watchfulness" and "faithfulness." Eternity with God awaits those who do so.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Matthew 25:31-33

Prior to this passage, Jesus had been speaking in parables. But his final words, found in Matthew 25:31-46, are not in the form of a parable. Rather, they are the startling description of an event that will actually occur in the future upon his return. In Matthew 24 and in the early chapters of the book of Revelation, we read that much will happen in the spiritual realm and on the earth before what Jesus speaks of in this text. After the rebellions and battles and tribulations, we find ourselves in verse 31.

Jesus comes in His glory with His angels - and we find that he is the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, that is sitting on His glorious throne. Jesus returns as the conquering king and takes His royal position on the royal throne of David for eternity - fulfilling the prophecies. The nations are then brought before Jesus and he starts the judgment proceedings. The first step is separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep go to one side – His right. And the goats go to His other side – His left. This is part of the Day of the Lord that takes place at the end of what is referred to as the Tribulation. Jesus uses the analogy of sheep and goats in his judgement simply because they were a familiar sight in Israel and everyone knew the characteristics of each animal. Sheep are docile, gentle creatures while goats are more rambunctious, often bordering on unruly. When Jesus sits on His glorious throne and separates the righteous from the wicked, His sheep hear His voice and will be put on His right hand. The goats, the unrighteous, do not listen to or heed Him and are placed on His left. Then each group is judged.

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. 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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ 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.’ Matthew 25:34-40

Notice here that Jesus is now referenced as “King.” Jesus first came as the humble Son of Man who would die the substitute sacrifice for our sin, but He returns as King. Notice as well, what the King says to those on His right. These are those that are “*blessed by His Father*” and they are called to inherit the kingdom that had been There is nothing haphazard going on in this court. Those who are on the right hand are not there by chance, luck or fate. They are there because God had already predestined and chosen and called and justified and glorified them from eternity past. These who are on the King’s right hand are those who are blessed of God because they have been made righteous through the Lord Jesus Christ.

But now notice in verse 35-36 what Jesus the King points out to them as the evidence of their righteousness: “*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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.*” Notice also the response of surprise and humility expressed by those whom Jesus *blessed* because of their deeds. “*Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?*” And King Jesus declared: “*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.*” All six actions that Jesus points out are common situations in life that would demonstrate a person’s heart towards God, each other and others. Jesus our King is telling us that our heart attitudes and actions of compassion toward those in need reflect the depth of our love for God.

Jesus does not use miracles or mighty works as the evidence of faith, but instead, He points out simple acts of responding with godly compassion to those around us – feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, housing the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison. No great intellect required, no theology degree demanded, no great act of piety, just a simple, humble response demonstrating the love of God to others. The fact that these actions are done even to “*the least of these*” stresses even more that they are acts of godly love and not something done out of selfish gain - for the “*least of these*” have nothing to offer in return for the kindness shown to them except gratitude.

In the context of the previous parables “*the least of these*” Jesus then refers to those most needy are among Jesus’ “*brothers*” - a reference to Jesus’ disciples and by extension all believers. The “*sheep*” are commended for their great compassion for those in need—for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger; for those who are naked, sick, or in prison. The righteous will inherit the kingdom not because of the compassionate works that they’ve done - but because their actions comes from their transformed hearts in response to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom, as evidenced by their compassion for the “*least of these.*” In caring for those in need, the righteous discover their acts of compassion are even for Jesus himself.

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. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:41-46

Here we read what Jesus will say to those on his left. In contrast to the sheep (who will “*inherit the kingdom*”), the goats are condemned to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The reason for their condemnation is that they are *guilty of sins of omission*—that is, they have refused to show compassion to the least of these, which is the same as if they failed to have any care for Jesus himself. Given the evident unrighteousness of their hearts in ignoring and refusing to care for the “*least of these*” - they are condemned to eternal punishment. Their failure to do works of compassion is just as much an evidence of their unrighteousness and lack of love for God, as doing such actions was evidence for the righteous of their love for God. Sins of omission – *failure to do right* – are just as serious as sins of commission – *actions of doing wrong*. That is a lesson and serious warning we all need to heed. While humanity tends to make a distinction between the two, *God does not*. God knows the heart, and the failure to do right reveals the true nature of the heart as much as actions of evil, which is even worse when we know what’s right but don’t do it.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:46

The concept of eternal punishment should not be a shock to us. God is perfectly holy and so His punishment for those who reject Him is to be expected. We *should not* be amazed at Jesus returning as the conquering king who will quench His wrath in judgment of those who have rejected Him. We *should constantly be amazed* at His great love demonstrated in His first coming in which He purchased our salvation through His own blood and in His consistent warnings to those who still reject Him. We *do not marvel* that God will condemn and punish sinners, yet we do *stand in wonder* of His offering forgiveness to us as sinners. It is *not remarkable* that there is a place of eternal punishment, but it *is astounding* that there is a place of eternal reward in heaven offered to repentant sinners. That God *would hate sin* is perfectly understandable. That God *would love the sinner* so much that He would send his son to redeem us by becoming a man and dying in our place is astonishing. How does *what we do* relate to Jesus’ final judgement and whether we go to heaven? Although *our salvation* depends on what Christ has done, *our eternal reward* is related to how we prepared ourselves for his return, what we did with the gifts He gave us, and how we loved and cared for each other *and the least of us here on earth.* 2019-03-24 Pastor Leland Botzet Arrowsmith Baptist Church