

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the sheep and the goats** Matthew 25:31-46. Remember that this parable was told in the context of parables about God's kingdom. This is a parable concerning JUDGEMENT IN GOD'S KINGDOM. Please read Matthew 25:31-46.

(S) Matthew 25:31-46 says, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 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 his sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 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.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 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.'

They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? 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.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

This is not really *a parable*, although it contains *elements of a parable*. For example, sheep and goats often intermingle during the day when they graze. But in the evening, when the shepherd calls his sheep, the goats do not respond! The sheep hear the voice of their shepherd and gather around him. But the goats have to be driven together. Matthew 25:31-46 is a dramatic description of the Last Judgement, making use of this symbolism.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

What is the context of this description of the Last Judgement?

The setting of this description of the Last Judgement is contained in Matthew chapter 24 and 25. These two chapters consist of Jesus' teaching on the Last Things. The message of these two chapters is that Christians should be watchful in view of Christ's return as the Judge and the Rewarder. The prophecies in these chapters have reference to both events in the near future and to events at the end time.

In Matthew 24, the approaching judgement upon Jerusalem and the Final Judgement of the whole world at the Second Coming are intertwined to form one great teaching on the Last Things. Jerusalem's approaching catastrophe serves as a *type*, that is, as an example that illustrates the tribulation at the end time.

In Matthew 25, the parable of the ten virgins teaches that watchfulness and preparedness throughout every day is required of every Christian, because Christ's Second Coming is unknown. The parable of the talents teaches that faithfulness and diligence in using their God-given abilities and opportunities before the Final Judgement is required of every Christian. At this point, Jesus described the Last Judgement in dramatic and frequent symbolic language.

The story and the explanation or application is in the form of a description of the Last Judgement.

(T) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to describe which of the details in this symbolic description of the Last Judgement are really essential or relevant:

Is the judgement throne on the earth or in the air? Based on Zechariah 14:4, some Christians place the throne on earth. However, Zechariah 14:4 does not speak of a throne and it is moreover quite possible for Christ to stand on the earth *after* the final judgement in the air! In the book of Revelation, the throne of God and the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is generally in the upper regions, probably in the air where the true Christians have ascended with joy to meet Christ (Rev 4:1-2; 5:6; 20:11-12; Mt 19:28-29; 25:31).

(S) Is the Judge God the Father or God the Son? In the outgoing divine works such as creation, providence, redemption and judgement, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity co-operate. Nevertheless, in the present passage it is clear that the honour of judging is conferred on Jesus Christ as the Mediator, as a reward for his accomplished mediatorial work (Phil 2:9-10). Jesus is called the “King” (Jn 18:36; Rev 19:16) and he is clothed with all authority in heaven and on earth (Eph 1:22).

(T) What is the function of angels? They are associated with Jesus Christ in the End Time. At the Second Coming, they will form Christ’s glorious train and they will have two important tasks to perform: One. After the resurrection from the dead and the transformation of the still living people on earth, the angels will gather God’s elected people from every place on earth. God’s elected people are all the true Christians. They will be caught up in the clouds to meet Jesus Christ in the air (Mt 24:31; 1 Thes 4:16-17). Two. The angels will weed out of God’s kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil, that is, they will drive them before the judgement throne, where Jesus Christ in co-operation with these angels will assign them a separated place on his left hand for final judgement. After the final judgement the angels will throw them soul and body into hell (Mt 13:40-42).

(S) Who are these nations gathered before the judgement throne? Some Christians believe that the judgement described in Matthew 25:31-46 is different than the judgement described in Revelation 20:11-15. They say that Matthew 25 describes the judgement of only the Gentile nations according to how they have treated the Jewish nation, and that Revelation 20 describes another judgement a thousand years later, namely the judgement of only the unrepentant sinners. However, there is no biblical warrant for this distinction! The judgement described in Matthew 25 and in Revelation 20 is one and the same final judgement. The judgement described in Matthew 25:31-46 is as *universal and final* as the same judgement described in Revelation 20:11-15! Matthew says “all the nations” and he does not mention the Jewish nation separately. Moreover, Matthew 19:28 specifically mentions that the Jewish nation will be judged at “the renewal of all things when Jesus sits on his glorious throne”, which is at this same time. The “nations gathered before the throne” are thus *all people who have ever lived regardless of their nationality!*

(T) How many final judgements will there be? Some people teach that there will be *several* final judgements and these coincide with their view of two separate second comings of Christ and with two separate resurrections from the dead separated by a thousand years. They teach that there will be one judgement of only the believers in Christ coinciding with the first “second coming” of Christ, another judgement of the Gentile nations coinciding with the second “second coming” of Christ, another judgement of only the Jews and one final judgement of only all unbelievers after one thousand years. This view is not biblical!

The Bible does not teach two second comings of Christ, but only one Second Coming (Acts 1:11, and as all the parables also teach)! The Bible does not teach two resurrections from the dead separated by a thousand years, but only one resurrection at the same time (Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)! The Bible does not teach several different final judgements, but only one final judgement immediately after the Second Coming and resurrection from the dead (Mt 25:31-33; 2 Pet 3:3-13; Rev 20:11-15)!

According to the passages in Matthew, at the Second Coming of Christ the Christians are resurrected or transformed and are first caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes 4:16-17; Mt 24:31,40a,41a). Later *on the same Last Day* the non-Christians, who are left behind when the angels gathered God’s elected people from every place on earth, are driven before the judgement throne (Mt 13:40-42; 24:40b,41b; 25:32-33).

(S) Who are the sheep and the goats? *Sheep* symbolise those people who believe or trust in Jesus Christ and follow him. They are meek and obedient (Jn 10:3-4,27). *Goats* on the other hand symbolise those people as well as evil spirits who are belligerent, unruly, and destructive (Ezek 34:17-19; Dan 8:5,7,21). The manner in which each person who stands before the judgement throne has treated “one of the least of these brothers of Jesus” will show whether he is a sheep or a goat. “The least of these brothers of Jesus” are all those people who are saved by grace regardless of their nationality, race, etc. Thus, the contrast in Matthew 25 is between the sheep, who represent those who are saved by faith, and the goats, who represent those who are lost because of their unbelief.

(T) Why are the sheep called ‘righteous’? The sheep are called ‘righteous’, that is, they are not only regarded and treated by God as righteous because of their faith in Jesus Christ, but they also live a righteous life. It is a *righteousness imputed and imparted!* These Christians are justified and live a sanctified life! The words with which Jesus welcomes the righteous show that they have lived their daily lives faithfully showing love, mercy and kindness to others, even to

the least among the Christians. It was not in spectacular miracles and great accomplishments (Mt 7:21-23), but in the ordinary and little things of life that these people have proved to be the disciples of Jesus Christ (Mt 25:35-36). These sincere followers of Christ, who honour Jesus Christ in the common things of life, are pronounced blessed. They had rendered their service spontaneously, gladly, gratefully and humbly and afterwards had completely forgotten it!

(S) Why are the goats called 'unrighteous'? The goats are called 'unrighteous', that is, they are not only regarded and treated by God as unrighteous because of their unbelief, but they also failed to live a righteous life. The words with which Jesus condemns the unrighteous show that they are especially condemned for their *sins of neglect*! Not a single wicked deed is mentioned in this passage, such as idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, etc. - only sins of neglect - such as neglecting to show love, mercy and kindness to others, especially to the least among the Christians. Their expression of surprise at their rejection is rooted in their complete self-delusion and unbelief.

(T) What is the only basis for salvation? In Matthew 25, even before the good deeds of the righteous are mentioned, Jesus emphasises that the basis of their salvation, and hence the basis of all their good deeds, is the fact that *they have been chosen by God to inherit God's kingdom from eternity*. Whether this has happened "from the creation" or "before the creation" makes no difference, because the result is the same (Mt 25:34; Eph 1:4)! Therefore, not their good deeds, but the sovereign grace of God is the foundation of their salvation. Their good deeds are the *fruit*, not the *root*, of grace! Thus, all the glory must be given only to God!

(S) What will be the criterion for judgement? The criterion for the final judgement will be faith in Jesus Christ. All people will be judged either according to their faith in Jesus Christ or their unbelief. The *evidence* of genuine faith or unbelief will consist in the way people have treated "the least of Christ's brothers", that is, in the way they have treated other Christians. The good works of the believers, whether many or few, will be the evidence of their genuine faith, while the sins of neglect of the unbelievers, whether numerous or sporadic, will be the evidence of their unbelief. At the final judgement, the good works of the believers or the sins of neglect of unbelievers will be *publicly proclaimed*. It is thus very clear that *the basis* of the final judgement will be faith or unbelief, and not good works or sins of neglect.

(T) What will be the inheritance of the sheep? The people who are saved by grace through faith will inherit the kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world. The kingdom in this context is God's kingdom in its final manifestation as the new heaven and the new earth. The righteous will receive the kingdom of God as God's sovereign and gracious gift (Jn 3:3; Rom 8:17; Col 1:13) and as an inalienable possession (Heb 12:28). The true Christians, who were already heirs of God's kingdom *by right* (Mt 5:3,10,19; Jn 3:3), will then also become heirs of God's kingdom *in fact* (Mt 25:34)! All the promises with respect to complete salvation of soul and body, and with respect to the renewal of the universe will then be fulfilled in them everlastingly and ever progressively! They will inherit everlasting life in God's kingdom in its final phase as the new heaven and the new earth. They will never be hungry or thirsty anymore (Rev 7:16). They will never again experience death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things on this present earth will have passed away. On the new heaven and new earth God will make everything new (Rev 21:3-5).

(S) What will be the punishment of the goats? The unbelievers and unrighteous will be thrown in hell. There they will for ever be separated from God's loving and caring presence (Dan 12:2; Mt 25:46; 2 Thes 1:8-9). They will suffer everlasting suffering (Isa 66:24; Mk 9:48; Rev 14:11; 18:21-23).

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46 teaches about *judgement in God's kingdom*.

The main message of the symbolic description of the Last Judgement is that "Christians and non-Christians will be judged by Jesus Christ at his Second Coming on the basis of their relationship to Christ and their conduct towards Christ's genuine followers." The Final Judgement is necessary for four reasons:

One. *The people still living on earth* at the Second Coming still need to be judged, that is, assigned either to heaven or to hell (1 Thes 4:15-17).

Two. All people who have ever lived still need to be judged with respect to *the exact degree of reward or punishment* that each will receive in soul and body throughout eternity. Up to the moment of the final judgement, all people who have died have been in heaven or hell only with respect to their *souls*, not their bodies (2 Cor 5:10).

Three. *The righteousness of God must be publicly displayed*, so that he may be glorified (Rom 3:21-24; 11:36).

Four. *The righteousness of Christ and the honour of his people must be publicly vindicated* (2 Thes 1:5-10). People's estimate that Jesus was a condemned criminal must be reversed and all people must see him whom they have crucified. They must see him in his glory together with his people (Rev 1:7; Phil 2:9-10).

(S) **POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.**

Let us take turns to make one comparison with this parable.

I would like to compare the parable with 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10. The one and only Final Judgement Day (8-9) will be at the Second “coming” (10) of Jesus Christ. On that day, *unbelievers* will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord. But *believers* will marvel at him and glorify him (10).

(T) I would like to compare the parable with Revelation 20:11-15. On the one and only Final Judgement Day (12), all the people who have died in the history of the world “will be given up by death and the grave (Hades)”, that is, without exception they will all be resurrected (13; John Jn 5:28-29). Everyone will be judged according to the books in heaven and the book of life. All *unbelievers* will be thrown into the lake of fire, because their names are not found written in the book of life. But all *believers* will inherit the new heaven and the new earth, because their names are found written in the book of life.

(S) **POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of the parable.

All people must know what God or Jesus Christ is like: At his Second Coming, Jesus Christ will come to judge all the people who have ever lived on earth! No one will escape! Everyone will have to give an account of his life to Jesus Christ!

(T) Christians must know what they should be like: Every person who has ever lived will be judged on the basis of his relationship with and his conduct towards Christ and Christians, no matter how insignificant a Christian may be. He will be judged according to *whether during his earthly life he has given evidence of his faith in Jesus Christ*, that is, whether he has lived the life of a true believer in Jesus Christ.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Special note: This ends the teaching of the parables of Jesus Christ. During the next two weeks we will introduce the book of Revelation. Therefore, read through the book of Revelation once.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.