WEEK 7

Assignment: READ and REVIEW: Matthew 25:31-46. <u>Parable of the Sheep and the Goat.</u> Video Presentation found on the ARIZE Institute of the Five-Fold Ministry and Bible College Website: www.arizefivefoldministry.info. Also located on YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/@ARIZEffmbc2019.

Discussion Questions to Consider concerning this parable.

1. What is the spiritual meaning of the sheep and the goats?
2. What are the corporal works of mercy in Matthew 25?
3. Who are "the least of these" that Jesus refers to?
4. Why are the goats condemned in the parable?

"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: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, since ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, since ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man Comes”: The Final Judgment

Okay, so what's being described here? Well, although we call this a parable, it's a little different than some of the other parables we've been looking at previously. It's not a long story; it's more of a short analogy in which Jesus briefly compares his parousia, his second coming in the final judgment at the end of time, to a shepherd separating sheep and goats. So, the opening lines of the parable make clear that that's the context.

First, when it says, “when the Son of Man comes in glory,” Jesus is talking about His final advent, His final coming at the end of time.

Second, when it says all the nations will be gathered before Him, it describes the final judgment. The final judgment is at the end of time when all of the dead will be raised. Not only the Israelites, but every nation, every people under heaven, everyone who has ever lived from the beginning of time until the end of time, will be judged by the Lord in what the Church calls the general or final judgment. So, Jesus makes clear from the beginning of this parable that that's what He's talking about. He's talking about the coming of the Son of Man at the final judgment.

Why Sheep and Goats? The Righteous and the Wicked

In that context, he uses the analogy of a shepherd separating the sheep and the goats as a metaphor for the final separation:

- The righteous will inherit everlasting life, and
- The wicked will inherit everlasting punishment.

So the imagery here is no accident: if you look at sheep and goats, you will notice that the two animals have very different, so to speak, personalities. Sheep are, as a rule, ***docile to the master***. They follow the shepherd, follow his voice, and flock together; they are docile creatures.

Goats — and if you ever had a goat you would know — are stubborn; as a rule, they are very stubborn animals. So even with the imagery of sheep and goats, you can sense the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

The righteous obey the Lord and are docile to God's will, whereas the goats, the wicked, are prideful, stubborn, and refuse to do God's will.

Jesus doesn’t state this explicitly, but the language and imagery of sheep and goats make it clear. So, he puts the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left, then begins to pronounce judgment.

Inheriting the Kingdom: Salvation, Providence, and the Foundation of the World

So, the judgment of the sheep is “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” This is interesting. So, a few elements here.

First, salvation is a blessing. It's a gift of God. That is why he calls them “blessed of my Father.”

Second, it's described as inheriting the kingdom. So, notice—my High School English teacher, Mrs. Sharp (deceased), always told the class, "Don’t mix your metaphors"—although Jesus mixes His metaphors here. On the one hand, He uses the image of a shepherd separating sheep and goats; on the other, He uses the metaphor of a king giving an inheritance to his subjects. So they inherit the kingdom of God, which it says here, “was prepared from the foundation of the world.” So, this isn’t an ordinary kingdom; this is an eternal kingdom. In other words, God has known from the very first day of creation, from the beginning of time, those who would inherit eternal life. This is called the doctrine of providence: God knows all things. He's not surprised by how things will turn out at the final judgment. He knows everything that has ever happened or ever will happen until the end of time. This is his divine foreknowledge and his divine providence: he's been guiding it and preparing for it from the foundation of the world.

The Corporal Works of Mercy: The Condition for the Kingdom

Now, the question everyone wants to ask is:

1. How do I get into the kingdom?
2. What's the condition for entering the kingdom?

In this parable, Jesus says something that might shock us. We can imagine Him saying, “Enter into the kingdom, inherit the kingdom, " to all of you who believed in me or who accepted me as the Messiah. You might think He's making faith a condition for entering the kingdom, and we'll see elsewhere that knowing Christ is essential to entering the kingdom. We saw that earlier in some of the parables. But in this parable, the emphasis falls on what the Church calls the corporal works of mercy—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison, visiting the sick, caring for those in need, and welcoming the stranger. It means, in particular, sojourners, immigrants.

So, in the first century A.D., when a person would immigrate from another country into the holy land, they were essentially bereft of the protections, the ordinary protections, of family, friends, employment, and those kinds of things. So, God made very clear to the people in the Old Testament that they were to welcome the stranger and not to abuse the stranger or abuse the immigrant or the alien or the person from another country.

"You Did It to Me": Christ in the Least of These

So Jesus is saying that when you did those works of mercy, what we call the corporal works of mercy, to the least of these, my brethren, you did them to me. Now that is a fascinating verse. When Jesus says that He tells us everything we need to know about the poor and the lowly, namely that any act of charity done to the poor is, in essence, an act of charity done to Christ Himself. It's a kind of mystical theology of the poor as living members of the body of Christ. So Jesus says, when you have done it to the least of these my brethren, the sick, the imprisoned, the naked, the hungry, you actually did this to me. So the reward for those acts of mercy is entering the kingdom of God. The parable ends by saying the righteous will enter eternal life. So that's another image for not just the kingdom of heaven, but what the Greek says here is *zōēn aiōnion*. We get the word zoology from that, the study of life. *Zōēn aiōnion* is a life that lasts forever; it's the life of the age to come, eternal life. That is the sheep.

The Goats and the Eternal Fire

What about the goats? This one is somewhat less positive. The goats on the left side are not blessed but cursed. In other words, they were punished for their sins. "Depart from me, you cursed," He says, "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." So instead of being saved and inheriting the kingdom, they are damned. They enter into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. That's a very important point there. You can see Jesus teaching that the fallen angels are themselves separated from God for all eternity. He uses the image of eternal fire to describe the pain of that separation. In this context, that obviously refers to a kind of spiritual fire, because the angels **don't have bodies**. Still, they're experiencing, in some way, in some mysterious way, the pain of **being separated from God** for all eternity. And in this case, it is very sobering: Jesus says that the damned are separated from God, but in a sense are joined to the devil and his angels. Their lot is with the devil and his angels in this eternal fire. Again, this is part

of divine providence; God prepared it from the very foundation of the world, and now it is coming to culmination at the final judgment.

Sins of Omission: When We Fail to Love Our Neighbor

So you might want to ask yourself here, what's the reason? What do I need to do to avoid experiencing this eternal separation from God? I always like to joke with my students: if you're at the final judgment and you see two lines, get in the sheep line; don't get in the goat line. But obviously that's just a joke here; the judgment is already decided by how we have lived our lives. And in this case, the goats, again, it doesn't say they are adulterers, it doesn't say they are murderers, it doesn't say that they are idolaters or any of those positive sins that we would normally associate with grave sin — and rightly, those are definitely described as grave sins in the Old Testament and in the New Testament — but what is described here, and this is really shocking, is sins of ***omission***. Namely, unlike the sheep, the goats here fail to perform the works of mercy, the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger, to visit those who are sick or in prison, and to give water to the thirsty. That's the only thing described here: they did not do those things to the least of Jesus' brethren, and as a result, Jesus says that when you fail to do that to them, you also fail to do it to me. In other words, when you fail to love your neighbor, you actually fail to love God. This is a sobering, important principle of the New Testament law of Christ.

What is the message of the parable of the sheep and the goats?

The parable teaches that at the final judgment the Son of Man will separate all people according to their love of neighbor. Those who performed the works of mercy inherit the kingdom, while those who neglected them are condemned — because whatever we do, or fail to do, for the needy we do to Christ himself.

What is the spiritual meaning of the sheep and the goats?
What are the corporal works of mercy in Matthew 25?
Who does Jesus mean by "the least of these"?
Why are the goats condemned in the parable?