

Matthew 25:31

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Date: 21 May 2006

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[0 : 00] So here are, in some ways, the Lord's very last formal words of instruction. And they focus on the theme of judgment.

And the chapter itself of this particular section is very carefully structured by the Lord. It's full of repetition to make it memorable.

So the lesson speaks forever in our minds. Now let's just turn to let it speak for itself. And let's first of all look at the judge in this great judgment scene.

Often referred to as the great assize. The last great day of judgment. And we have the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory.

This title, the Son of Man, is itself a remarkable title. It's used only by the Lord Jesus.

[1 : 10] Nobody else refers to him as the Son of Man. But at the same time, it is his preferred self-assignation.

So he most often speaks of himself as the Son of Man. And there is implicit in this title a tremendous claim.

The claim to be the Son of Man of Daniel, chapter 7. The Lord saying, I am that Son of Man.

Now those details I'll leave aside for the moment. But the important points are, only the Lord calls himself the Son of Man. And for him it is his favourite name for himself.

And at this point in his life, the Lord himself has been through a great deal of suffering.

[2 : 14] But he knows that very shortly, he's going to suffer even more on the cross of Calvary. The Son of Man has come to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

And he knows that very shortly, he himself will stand on trial before Pontius Pilate.

And soon he will sit, not on a royal throne, but on a rough, rugged and painful cross.

And yet in the shadow of that very, very imminent experience, just in the shadow of the cross, he gives us this very different vision of himself.

Not as a sinner, not as a prisoner, or a condemned man, or as a crucified criminal.

[3 : 25] But here he is now, on the throne of judgment. The Son of Man come in his glory. And in the words, on that day, the glory is utterly and totally unveiled.

There's no doubt who he is or what he is. His identity fully revealed. Because he's come in glory with all the paraphernalia and accoutrements of his own majesty.

He has come with the holy angels. He has come in the glory of his Father. He has come with all those insignia of his own divine power.

So, here he is. The Son of Man title is not itself an affirmation of the Lord's humanity, or the Lord's humiliation, because the Son of Man, the Son of Man, is an eternal, glorious figure with a worldwide and eternal empire.

But, this Christ, who has come, as a sinner of man, he is going one day to suffer, one day very shortly to suffer, on the cross of Calvary.

[4 : 53] But, he will come again in his Father's glory. And yet, I think that that human dimension, the Son of Man, there is an important emphasis there that the judge on this great day is one of us experience of what being human means, and what being tempted means.

He has compassion upon us in our own weaknesses. And I like to think that, though, God's judgment would be a judgment that is according to his own omniscience, and according to his own absolute equity.

nevertheless, every explanation, every extenuation that we can offer, will be listened to very, very carefully by the Son of Man.

So, here we have this remarkable scene. The Christ, about to be crucified, about to go on trial, is giving us, on the threshold of that trial, this mission of himself, seated on the throne of judgment.

And then you see, who are all gathered before him. And we're told that all the nations are there, gathered before the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 31] Now, you might quite correctly ask yourself, how can one man or one person judge all the nations?

And it's again a tribute to the glory of Jesus, that he is of such all-comprehending knowledge, and of such universal insight and sovereignty, that he is equipped to judge all the nations.

And we know that to that, there are no exceptions. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, every single one of us.

We're told in Revelation that death and hell will give up their dead, and even the sea will give up its dead. And the small and the great, they will all stand before the Lord.

It's so utterly comprehensive. The great will be there. Those great figures of public note and celebrity.

[7 : 46] Pontius Pilate, he'll be there. And Nero, and Caligula, they'll be there. And Hitler, and Stalin, and Christchurch, and Chairman Mao, well, they'll be there.

And all the great ones on the positive side, Saint Paul, and Saint Peter, and Augustine, and Luther, and Calvin, well, they'll be there.

And all the believers will be there. There will be absolutely no exception. Every single one of us, and I suppose at last, the one in marriage is that you and I will be there.

We have what I might even dare to call this date with destiny. We don't know when, but we know that one day we shall stand, each one of us, before the Son of Man.

And we shall stand there, and I tell you, eyeball to eyeball, with our Maker, and our Redeemer. So, every nation, every individual, the small, those of us who are so insignificant, who have never made a mark, who have not been big enough to be noticed, but the Lord will notice us, the Lord will call us, and we shall appear.

[9 : 18] That is, not simply put in an appearance, but we shall be made, we shall be disclosed, we shall be made apparent.

The truth about me will come out of this great day of judgment. All the nations, believers, believers, unbelievers, the great, the small, you, I, every single one of us gathered there.

And yet, although we are all gathered there, we are told to you that there is a great line of separation and division running through this assembled multitude.

There are sheep, and there are goats, those on the left hand, and those on the right. And it is not that the division is made on that day of judgment, but the day will bring out and disclose, declare, make manifest the division, because the division exists already.

It is already in place. But on that day, that division is brought right out into the open. Two kinds of human beings, the sheep and the goats.

[10 : 42] And the unerring discernment, the unerring judgment of the omniscient son of man will effect and declare that division utterly infallibly.

there is not the slightest risk of any of us ending up on the wrong side of the line. Now this is the Lord's own teaching.

It is in many ways the Lord's own last word. One peculiar fact of this chapter is there is no application.

The Lord isn't going to say in the light of this do that. or don't do that. But he lets it speak for itself. Let me do the same. We will all be there and we'll all be on one side of the line or the other among the sheep or among the goats.

[11 : 55] And if you look at those who are on the left the Lord is very clear about them and he says to them depart from me you cursed.

Now let me say this that those on the left the goats the cursed those who go into eternal fire eternal punishment they are a kind of parenthesis in the Bible in a very important sense the Bible has no great interest in them it doesn't have all that much to say about hell.

In fact all it says of that is incidental to its presentation of heaven and of the righteous just as here the concern is with the righteous but incidentally there are those on the left and they're there incidentally just as in the world to come they'll be outside so in a way they're outside the power of you the scope the vision of the Bible itself so they are brought in because there has to be clarity on the issue that not all of us are going to inherit the kingdom but the teaching of that is minimal as much as is needed but no more than is needed and they're told depart the truly thing is you know

that here these people will say to

Jesus later on they will say Lord Lord and all of a sudden you see they're so pious and so sound and so orthodox Lord Lord and they're so respectful and so reverent all of a sudden Lord Lord when did we not help you Lord Lord so so deferential but he says depart that tremendous word of banishment and depart where into the place prepared for you no it's not that you see it's not the place prepared for you it's a place prepared for the devil and his angels anyway you see not fit for human habitation depart to that other place so we have this universal assembly of the whole human race the greatest coming together of human beings the world has ever seen and running through that assembly this great line of division right hand left hand feet and goats and some let me hope for a small minority and let me hope in addition none of us here will hear those words depart into that place prepared not for humans but for the devil and for his angels and then the

Lord turns there to the righteous to the sheep and he says to them come you who are blessed by my father take your inheritance the kingdom appeared for you before the creation of the world the come you see some are told depart and some are told come come with me come with me because that's what heaven is to be with Christ which is far better there is seen on the throne and all this glory and they say themselves what a splendid figure what a glorious figure what a gracious loving loving figure and then they told come and be with me in the glory

[16:48] I had with the father before the world was remember how he prayed Abba I want them to be with me for I am and that's what he said you come with me you come to my father's house and come inherit the kingdom that is all the blessings that Christ as king as earned for his own people you come he says to the new Jerusalem that great city and don't worry he says about there being no room because it's been built for a great mountain that no man can number in my father's house there are many rooms and so you come into my kingdom remember the words of our own charter catechism we are made perfectly blessed in the full joy of

God to all eternity you come with me come with me to my father's house come with me to new Jerusalem come with me into my glory come into that perfect blessedness that I have with my father it been prepared for you remember prepared for the devil and his angels this one prepared for you an environment physically and spiritually specifically and fully adapted to our needs as human beings it's been prepared for you it has all we need for our sustenance all we need for our comfort all we need for our stimulation all we need to satisfy every sense that we shall have perhaps more sense that we have on the side of the grave but every sense we have so fully satisfied what sights will be there what aromas will be there and what textures and fabrics will be there and what music will be there it's been prepared for you humans made in the image of God for your kinds of mind for your kinds of aesthetic sense for your kind of emotions for your kind of senses to stimily challenge you it's been prepared specifically for you so you come with me that's what he's saying to us now us certainly as you and I meet in this place this morning this assembly will one day take place and this coat will one day sit and angels perhaps walk in and say all rise we shall stand before the son of man in his glory the whole human race but at last each of us alone eyeball to eyeball with the son of man and we here either depart or we here come and then the criterion the standard by which we are judged and the son of man turns to the sheep and he tells them

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat I was thirsty I was a stranger I was naked I was ill I was in prison and you know part of the rhetoric of this chapter is that time and again that list is repeated I don't have gone in the main times but it's done time and again that list recurs to impress the list of six basic human needs on your minds and that list comprehends virtually all the needs of the destitute all the possible forms of human destitution there is hunger there is thirst there is nakedness there is illness there is alienation there is imprisonment and the standard is how did we treat people in that condition and that becomes such a searching issue because of course in many ways these are problems that beset largely those at the bottom of the social scale at what Thomas Chalmers called the base of the pyramid or indeed the basement of human society or what General Ruth called the submerged pool and we're not asked at all how do you deal with celebrities so unsuccessful or the academic or the important or the powerful but how did we ourselves treat those who were afflicted by those great basic forms of human destitution what was our attitude towards the hungry and the thirsty and the naked and the stranger the alien the immigrant immigrant the immigrant the asylum seeker the foreigner what was our attitude towards them towards those who were who were imprisoned implicit implicit again a savior what was our attitude

towards them that is

[23 : 36] Jesus charge and it's a challenge of course because these were the circles in which he himself moved and in which he gave the most of his strength as he went about doing good and we are called upon to pursue that same path going about doing good good well who are they they say well the believers the sheep they say to good lord when did we see you in prison and when did we see you sick and visit we will give you clothes or food or whatever lord when did we do this because they can't remember they can't remember because their right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing they were doing good without knowing it but you know that becomes the occasion of the lord they're stating a great principle in verse 40 they put a question lord when did we see this look at verse 40 if I can put it perhaps more literally for you the king will reply amen amen

I say to you what you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine you did for me that amen that truly is so important because the lord says amen only when laying down a principle of fundamental importance amen then I say to you if you did that for what of the least of these brothers of mine or sisters of mine then you did it for me now the issue then becomes are we talking here of good done by us to the followers of Jesus and is it restricted to the followers of Jesus in other words it's a principle that if we help other Christians then we are sheep that certainly is a very important part of the

Lord's principle that there are things we do to people in the name of a disciple because they are our friends our sisters or brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ and of course all over the world today that our brothers and sisters in Jesus who are hungry who are thirsty who are naked who are ill who are aliens who are imprisoned and largely because they are Christians and just as poor churches of Rome and of Corinth and Philippi to help the believers in Jerusalem so the plight of those other believers ought to weigh heavily upon our minds and upon our hearts this morning our fellow Christians who are suffering destitution but I'm reluctant to leave it at that point as if the obligation were only towards other Christians because the Lord did not confine his ministering to those who were or became his own faithful followers believers remember at Pentecost there were something like perhaps 500 believers in the world and yet on one single occasion Christ fed 5000 people did he ask them first of all are you born again before he fed them he went about doing good and it seems to me that we are obligated to engage in this

Christ directed activity without asking first and foremost are you a believer or are you not in other words that the claim lies in the poverty in the destitution of the need itself remember James' great picture of an early Christian church and a poor man walks in and they say to the poor man you stand in the corner over there and then a rich man comes in the shoulder to the very best seat in the auditorium now what's James saying he's saying to you saying to us if Jesus Christ had walked in you'd have told him to stand in the corner because he looked like a homeless person not as bad as that you say yes literally a homeless person so you stand in the corner and although almost all commentators want to restrict this great teaching to heavenly fellow believers

[29 : 38] I think theologically it's slightly much deeper than that I'm saying this to me that the poor the pauper the hungry thirsty the asylum seeker the alien they are sacraments of the Lord Jesus signs and symbols and seals of Christ he said foxes of hoes and the birds of the air of nests but the son of man has nowhere to raise him on this great judgment day of course you never know that he was ever homeless or ever hungry or ever tired or ever hung hand hand on a cross in Cal Cal when he was I was hungry I was thirsty

I was a stranger I was imprisoned the pool the sacraments of Jesus and as I close this morning I won't keep you very much longer there is such a challenge there to us and both an individual and at church level I challenge you to emulate the Lord and Savior who went about doing good and specifically targeted the six basic needs which are specified so repeatedly in this chapter I have we are so conscious to see of our obligation to the un-evangelized that I don't want to minimize that we have also a

Christ given obligation to the hungry the thirsty the naked the alien the sick and the imprisoned that is an obligation that lies upon the impersonal but it also lies on this church that like its Lord it must go about doing good and as we reflect upon our future this is an area which I think calls for careful and rigorous reflection you have an organized program of evangelism do you have an organized program for going about doing good you target the un-evangelized you target the hungry the asylum seeker and the imprisoned of course

I am part of the gift that outreach as informed by Jesus cannot ignore the claims of the poor we debate academics almost endlessly the priority of evangelism over social concern there is no prioritization they are all obligatory now of course part of what we must think about is where in our city in our catchment areas there are the hungry thirsty the naked the aliens and the imprisonment so we've got to think about all of these things but sometimes the poor are so poor that you've got to feed them before you witness to them and indeed your feeding becomes your witness to them I am not here this morning to lay down tactics or a managerial program or a delivery program I am here to remind you of the strategy the targets that Christ proposed to his church and that strategy was one that lay firmly within those six basic forms of the destitution of course it is perfectly possible that you too have been doing this without knowing it and all credit to you and glory to God for that is this justification by works it seems to me that it is more likely the vindication of

[35 : 12] God because you know the way God has saved us by grace the way God has saved us it leaves God open to a charge that God saved us in a way that meant that where sin abounded grace did much more abound and therefore that us sins were grace may abound God saved these people in a most dangerous way because they were saved in such way that it didn't matter how they lived because they were saved they were saved by grace and how they lived didn't matter and that's the charge that God is open to and here on the judgment day God is vindicated and God says ah look who says to the world these are my children these are my kids these are my justified ones my righteous ones and you said oh the way you save them is all wrong because they take advantage of their grace they live reckless antinomian lies selfish lies nothing but meetings and meetings and meetings and meetings and they would give a care for the world because they know that they were saved by works works don't matter they just they were saved see that now he says my children are the way

I saved them I saved them through faith by grace alone see the fruit of the faith see how they went about to engulf see how like my son they are how glorious in their selfless holiness they are this is the vindication of God's way of saving us that we who are adopted by God as sinners are transformed by God's grace and God's grace is vindicated in the way that we have lived and what is the hallmark of the way that we have lived it is it is that we are fed the hungry even adhering to the thirsty clothed the naked healthy alien visit the sick and those in prison it is there that our Christ likeness shines you can go back into the profoundest foundation of your theology we have been foreordained predestimated to be conformed to the image of a son who went about to be good may God help us to make the adjustment let's join in prayer oh Lord guide us we pray by your spirit give us light on your word and light by your word and help us to serve you as your word directs give us Lord the grace patience wisdom of resources to meet destitution in all its forms in our own circles and pardon us all of sin for our Savior's sake Amen