

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

Day-D With Destiny

Matthew 25:31-46

Written By

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Throughout all of the political turmoil in Israel prior to the fall of the northern kingdom, Ephraim in 722 B.C., followed by the demise of the southern kingdom, Judah in 586 B.C., God ominously warned them of a day when He would appear and definitively judge the nations. Historically and biblically, this time of divine intervention into our dimensionality and time continuum is known as “the day of the Lord.”¹ It is the day when God settles scores, rights wrongs, abolishes corrupt and inferior earthly empires and political systems, crushes to powder false religious systems, rewards the righteous, and erects His prophesied Davidic Empire in order to display His glory and majesty as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. To read through the booming, blasting voice of the Old Testament prophets is to catch a glimpse of this particular day:

- Ezekiel relates how this day is always is a state of arriving suddenly:

³ For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations (Ezekiel 30).

¹ It also has other names: Day of judgment (Matthew 10:15); Day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7-8); Day of wrath (Zephaniah 1:18; Romans 2:5); End of the Age (Matthew 13:37-50); the Great Day (Jude 6); and the Last Day (John 12:48).

- Obadiah relates how it will be the day built on the principle of *lex talionis*:²

¹⁵ For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.

- Amos warns how it will be a day of literal cosmic darkness:

¹⁸ Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, For what purpose will the day of the Lord be to you? It will be darkness and not light; ... ²⁰ Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5).

- Isaiah recounts the fierceness of divine justice in this day:

⁹ Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it (Isaiah 13).

- Isaiah also warns it is a day where the pride of man will be completely eviscerated:

¹² For the Lord of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased (Isaiah 2).

- Isaiah relates how the Messiah will become the object of worship from the Gentiles and the Jews, His chosen people, because of this day:

¹⁰ Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious. ¹¹ Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea (Isaiah 11).

As we learn, the divine day will be a time of long-overdue holy judgment of the moral, spiritual, judicial, financial, political digression of sinners, followed by a prophesied time of universal hope, peace, and long-awaited cosmic restoration at all levels.

Amazingly, Jesus's last eschatological words to His disciples prior to His crucifixion, speak openly, honestly, and graphically about this day, underscoring the fact that He will be the One, as the Messiah, administering the day of divine wrath and restoration. He speaks about it

² Soanes, Catherine, and Angus Stevenson, eds. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). *lex talionis* /ləks ˌtaliˈəʊnɪs/ ■ **noun** the law of retaliation, whereby a punishment resembles the offence committed in kind and degree. —ORIGIN Latin, from *lex* 'law' and *talis* 'such'.

in Matthew 24:1-35 in bone-rattling, mind-numbing terms. He warns His followers, in a series of parables in Matthew 24:36-25:30, to always be faithful living as kingdom members prior to His glorious, spectacular, surprise arrival. His revelation of this day reaches its zenith in a familiar metaphor about sheep and goats in verses 31 through 46, the focus of our current analysis.

Only Matthew speaks of this account, and rightly so, for His purpose seeks to portray Jesus as the true messianic king to the chosen people of God, Israel. They were, unfortunately and sadly about to reject and murder Him on the up and coming Friday. But this wouldn't thwart His messianic mission. Quite the contrary. It would help Him fulfill it through His resurrection so He could become the perfect prophesied Savior (Isaiah 53), the High Priest (Psalm 110), and Davidic King (Psalm 2). The question in the interim of His fulfilling the prophesied roles couldn't be clearer in light of all of this: *Would people embrace or reject the coming divine Messiah and Judge?* To move the masses to acceptance of His lordship and messiahship, and to get the attention of everyone concerning how the divine day will end, Jesus closes the Olivet Discourse with a sober ...

Warning! Performance Reveals Position (Matthew 25:31-46)

In Matthew 7, Jesus warns us that a person's fruits, be they spiritual or carnal, serve to reveal whether they embrace or efface Him as the messianic Savior.

¹⁵ Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷ So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits.

On Judgment Day, at the close of the Second Coming, one's actions in life will be used to reveal where you stood with Jesus. Mind you, the works don't secure you a standing with Him, they merely demonstrate and substantiate if you followed Him or opposed Him. As you might guess, the eternal consequence of either position is exciting as it can be bone-chilling. The King is coming for His day. Are you prepared to meet Him?

Matthew's recollection of Christ's final pedagogical words in this section can be easily broken down into five literary movements.

The Revelation (Matthew 25:31-36)

This sub-title, of course, speaks of Christ's revelation at the end of the seven year tribulation. It has, in my estimation, four clarifying points.

Its Picture (Matthew 25:31).

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

The temporal conjunction “when” (ὅταν) appears first in the Greek in order to underscore and emphasize the time truth of this ancient prophecy. The point is well-taken: Jesus is going to return as prophesied and it is *then*, not prior to this, as is suggested by those of the Inaugurated Eschatology position,³ that He takes His David throne. Here He also takes the human title of Son of Man from Daniel 7:13, which is the classic passage detailing how the Messiah will one day topple all godless earthly empires in order to establish His magnificent and holy Davidic Empire.

¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. ¹³ I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. ¹⁴ And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed (Daniel 7).

As I have said before, as the forces of the world are satanically arrayed to wipe Israel and Christians off the map, is when Jesus, the God-man, pulls back the curtain separating our world from His and makes His grand, jaw-dropping appearance. And He will not be alone. Billions of angels will follow Him (Jude 14), as well as the glorified saints who compose the Church or martyred believers from the Tribulation (Revelation 19:14 “⁴ *And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.*” Interestingly enough, the only people wearing white in the book of Revelation are saints: Revelation 3:4, 8; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14). What a sight this will be during the darkest day ever known to mankind. There will be no doubt who is revealed and descending to the earth. The purpose of His revelation is disclosed in the next two verses:

Its Purpose (Matthew 25:32-33).

³² All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

God is quite clear: Everyone, from every walk of life, from every nation will be judged when He appears. None will get a pass because of who they are, what their pedigree is, how scientifically minded they were, how much wealth and power they held, what school they received their academic education from, or what religion they embraced. Everyone who lived through the Tribulation period will be gathered before Him (probably by the angels), and judged to determine whether they followed Him or followed after sin and Satan. Mark this well. People who enjoy sin today might think they are getting off scot free, but one day they will reap what they have sown when they are individually brought before the throne of the One who knows all (Psalm 62:12, God will judge each person according to their deeds; Jeremiah 17:10, God will judge

³ Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom Of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004): 56-60.

the thoughts, which is a concept articulated by Paul as well in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; and Matthew 12:35-37 cautions us that God will judge our very words).

For the omniscient Christ, the Day of Judgment designed to populate His millennial kingdom, will be as easy as separating sheep from goats. Jewish shepherds typically did this at night because goats couldn't cope with cold as easily as sheep could, and I'm sure the disciples quickly wrapped their minds around this image they had witnessed countless times in their lives. The sheep, of course, biblically represent God's people or believers (Ezekiel 34:17-20; Zechariah 13:7; John 10), and more specifically they denote tribulation saints in this passage. The goats, of course, represent unbelievers who have rejected the Messiah, Jesus, choosing rather to worship the Anti-Christ. The sheep will be placed one by one on the right side of Christ's Davidic throne (Isaiah 9), which a sign of favor, acceptance, and honor (1 Kings 2:19; Psalm 45:9; 110:1). The left side of His throne is reserved for the goats, and it will be a place of disfavor, rejection, and dishonor ... forever. All of this makes you ask yourself: Which side will I stand on when God judges me?

Won't this take a long time? Not really because, if you will recall, millions of people will not survive either the cosmic judgments of God (Revelation 6-19), or the wrath of the Anti-Christ (Revelation 13).

How much time will they have? Forty -five days. How can I say this? Because Daniel relates, as does Revelation, how the tribulation is 3 ½ years, or 1260 days Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:5. Daniel also discloses there will an extra amount of time after the Tribulation totaling 1290 days (Daniel 12:11), and also a 1335 day period. Subtracting this last figure from the first figure gives us the forty-five day hiatus period between the close of the Tribulation and the commencement of the Millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6). Imagine the scene in your mind as day after day countless streams of people go to Jerusalem to stand before Christ's lofty throne. Imagine as you approach the throne all you hear are the words, "Sheep, sheep, goat, sheep, goat, goat, goat, goat ..." Again, this should make you consider which "animal" you are. Are you a sheep of Christ or a godless goat?

What happens when this judgmental review is complete? Matthew tells us in the next verse as he opens up more insight concerning the revelation of Jesus, the Messiah:

Its Preparation (Matthew 25:34).

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

The kingdom, of course, will be the earthly Davidic kingdom promised by numerous prophets in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11; 24; 25; 54; 60; 61; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-17, 20-21; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Daniel 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; Zechariah 12-14).⁴ Isn't this comforting? From the very beginning of time, God, in His rich wisdom and love for His elect, made plans for them to enjoy a true, wonderful utopian society with Him as the true and perfect King. You who suffer from low self-esteem should stop and let the wind of this truth fill your limp sails.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of this intriguing, exciting topic read Alva McClain's *The Greatness of the Kingdom* or Charles Ryrie's *The Basis of The Premillennial Faith*.

How is it that this sheep receives this spectacular, off-the-charts, priceless inheritance? By coming in child-like faith to the feet of the only One who can save them ... Jesus. As Jesus states in John 5:

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

You don't earn an inheritance. No. An inheritance is given to you freely as a child of your father. The same certainly applies to children of Christ. He will lovingly give each of us the wonderful opportunity to rule and reign alongside Him in his prophesied Davidic Empire. Will you be there?

Its Principle (Matthew 25:35-36). What evidence does the Lord look for beyond a faith profession to determine whether one is a sheep or a goat? He explains His penetrating principle in the ensuing verses:

³⁵ '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; ³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

Jesus zeros in on how these saints cared for the less fortunate during the rough days of the Tribulation. He lists six things He watched them selflessly and sacrificially evidence toward needy, hurting people, and each one, of course, addresses real, practical life needs. Interesting, at a time of great personal woe because of the Anti-Christ's ruthless activity and the natural, logical results of God's cosmic judgments, Jesus sees His people, His true followers doing what they should be known for: Meeting needs and thereby impacting society. Obviously, they learned from watching their Lord in action on the pages of the New Testament (John 3, Nicodemus; John 4, turning water to wine; healing a lame man, John 5; feeding the 5,000, John 6 ... and so on and so forth). Again, these actions don't secure their place in the kingdom, but merely reveal they are kingdom members.

When these sheep hear these words from the revelatory divine Judge, what do they say?

The Response (Matthew 25:37-39)

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? ³⁸ 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

They are shocked as they look back over their activities during the Tribulation. They couldn't think of one episode where they had ever seen Jesus when they handed someone a cold cup of water when water was hard to find, or when they had given someone some clothes when theirs

were tattered and torn from the constant running from the divine earthly judgments. Can't you just sense their humility and meekness? So it is with people sold out to Jesus. They evidence His kingdom principles so naturally they don't even think about the fact they are performing these deeds, as if it were, to Him. Such is a mindset we should all evidence, even in this Age of Grace prior to the Tribulation. Do you? Are you one who meets basic life needs of the needy? Such activity is a sign of sainthood.

The revelation of this entire future scenario leads to a loving, intriguing response by Jesus from His Davidic throne.

The Reply (Matthew 25:40)

His words are soft and tender:

⁴⁰ The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

Ah, this is most instructive, contextually speaking. Jesus narrows the acts of mercy to His brothers. While taking care of the poor and less fortunate is an important part of Christian living, this is not what Jesus refers to here. Remember two things: words usage and context.

Donald Hagner correctly isolates the meaning of the phrase "these brothers of mine."

The use of τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου, "my brothers," makes it almost certain that the statement refers not to human beings in general but rather to brothers and sisters of the Christian community. *Elsewhere in the Gospel it is consistently the disciples whom Jesus calls "my brothers" (12:48–49; 28:10; see too 23:8; outside Matthew, see John 20:17; Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11–12).* Although ἐλάχιστος, "least," is used elsewhere in Matthew to refer to persons only in 5:19, the true counterpart to the phrase "one of these least" is found in Matthew's distinctive οἱ μικροί, "the little ones" (of which ἐλάχιστος, "least," is the superlative), a phrase used by Matthew to refer to disciples generally (see 18:6, 10, 14, where the subject is also Christian treatment of Christians; see Winandy). A confirmation of the correctness of this conclusion is found in the use of the phrase in a sentence that makes much the same point as the present passage: "Whoever gives one of these little ones [ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων] a drink [ποτίση, same verb as in the present passage] of cold water in the name of a disciple, truly I tell you, will in no wise lose his [her] reward" (10:42). This follows a statement about the identification of master and disciple that is very much in line with the thought of the present pericope: "The one who receives you receives me, and the one who receives me receives the one who sent me" (10:40).⁵

I couldn't agree more.

Ostensibly, this is a very important contextual point. If "brothers of Jesus" refers to believers, which I believe it does, then Jesus is specifically speaking about treatment of believers

⁵ Hagner, Donald A. *Matthew 14–28*. Vol. 33B (Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1998): 744.

by other believers at the most evil, vile, dangerous time of recorded history, especially for Christians. Remember, if you don't have the mark of the Beast, you don't buy or sell, meaning you will have a hard time making a living and putting food on the table. You'll be a social outcast by society, a narrow-minded Bible-thumper who needs to either get on with the progressive program or pay the consequences. Further, the Anti-Christ will work overtime to eradicate Jews and Christians, hunting them down through his intricate political/military machine (Daniel 7:21-25; Revelation 7; 13). Many will also languish in the prisons of the Beast for their failure to acquiesce to his totalitarian, despotic demands from his subjects. He'll also incarcerate them for worshipping Jesus instead of worshipping him. You can readily see, based on this brief description how dangerous and costly it will be to reach out and help believers, but such is what saints will do because that is what they do, by definition of who they are. No wonder He places them at His magnificent and powerful right hand. All of this, of course, brings the words of Paul into greater focus:

¹⁰ So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Galatians 6).

Regardless of what age we live in, whether it is the Age of Grace or the Tribulational, we, as saints of the Most High God, should always look for opportunities to alleviate the needs of those who stand up and live for Jesus Christ and have suffered accordingly. Don't you find this principle of judgment most moving and compelling? When Jesus is about to erect His kingdom, He first isolates His people from those who aren't His by looking at their commitment to care compassionately for each other. I'd dare say we have a model to adhere to in our day since this is the heart of Christ.

How one responds to believers shows one will inherit either a destiny designed for God's kingdom or one which will inherit eternal damnation. Jesus opens up this meaning as the story turns in a negative direction with verse 41. I call this section ...

The Ruination (Matthew 25:41-43)

For those who are goats, the Lord is far from tolerant, broad-minded, and flexible:

⁴¹ Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

Ominous, spine-stiffening terms, ones our culture doesn't like or want to hear. But hear them we must.

From verse 41, we learn that the ruination of goats is perpetual. Christ's words sound eerily familiar with what He says about Judgment Day back in Matthew 7:23, "*I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.*" Those who didn't tolerate Christians for not tolerating their false messiah, the Anti-Christ, those who turned in Christians to the authorities for holding Bible studies in their homes, those who used legal means to shut the mouths of Christians in the public square, those who, well, you can fill in the proverbial blank, those will

be found to be accursed in the presence of Jesus, the Judge. Their destination will be the eternal fires of hell, really the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15), prepared first for the Devil and his angels. And the fire will be eternal. Why? Here are some reasons from Dr. Norman Geisler:

- God's justice demands it. Why? Because not all sin is judged and punished in this life. God is just and justice demands a verdict on sin and evil, and since sometimes the wicked flourish in this life (Psalm 37), there has to be a place where such deeds meet with divine justice.
- The only just punishment for sin against the eternal God is eternal punishment.
- New Testament texts speak of a perpetual judgment in the next life (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 2 Peter 2:4, 9; Jude 6; Revelation 14:10-11; 20:10-15)
- Jesus speaks about the existence of hell as a place of perpetual torment (Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 11:23; 13:40-41, 49-50; 22:13; 23:15, 33).
- Luke 16 speaks clearly about heaven and hell being places of perfect consciousness and either blessing or torment.⁶

Imagine. For all eternity the lost will have to ponder why those chose to live for the moment and to persecute, mock, and ridicule Christians. I'm sure they will find no adequate answers to give solace to their tormented souls.

Such activity is already at work in our world. It has been since the fall of man, and it is merely picking up speed as we head toward the Tribulation. Every pastor who is thrown into an Iranian jail, every church which is burned to the ground by the intolerant ISIS soldiers, every Christian who is stoned for proselytizing in an Islamic country, every couple who are persecuted by our legal system because they won't marry people of the same sex at their public marriage facilities, every pastor who is petitioned to turn in his sermons for approval by a mayor, every Christian student who is forced to write papers espousing godless views in order to keep his or her grade up, yes, each of these scenarios merely shows us how dark the hour is, indeed. Those who are the victimizers should take note of Christ's words. You might be having the time of your life now, you might be enjoying the advancement of your digressive views of morality and sexuality, you might be relishing in the glory of embracing any and all faiths except Christianity, but one day you'll have to give account before the living God.

From verses 42 and 43, we learn how cold-hearted future unbelievers will be toward Christians. They will not meet one of their practical needs, opting to side with the Anti-Christ and his minions.

- For a family who will lose their house because they won't take the mark of the Beast ... that will be just too bad.
- For that buddy who lost his job because he was caught reading his Bible in private on a break, and now nobody will hire him for fear of government reprisals ... that will just too bad.
- For those Christians who are thrown into county jails because of their identification with Jesus ... that will be just too bad.

⁶ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Church & Last Things*, Vol. 4 (Minnesota: Bethany House, 2005): 330ff.

- For those poor believers who will walk around with moth-eaten, weathered, soiled clothes because they can't purchase any new clothes because they aren't part of Anti-Christ's progressive monetary system ... that will be just too bad.

Unbelievers will see these sad, desperate saints, but they will either willfully chose not to lift a finger for fear of attacks against them, or they will be part of those incursions. Either way they will all be found guilty at Christ's judgment bar for failing to meet the needs of His sheep.

As a sidelight, one can't help but see how readily applicable these words were to how the world was going to respond to Jesus on that next Friday. They would oppose Him without cause, failing to meet His most basic needs. They'd also move out to oppose His sheep, sometimes in the most horrific means. But one day there will be the day of the great reversal, the day when justice will reign supremely. Jesus, obviously, looked forward to that day when righteousness would replace unrighteousness.

Will the lost go quietly? No. Their own arrogance will move them to argue with the messianic Judge. We see this in the final words which I call ...

The Rejoiner (Matthew 25:44-46)

⁴⁴ Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'

⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' ⁴⁶ "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

It's not as if they could have secured eternal inheritance by simply giving to needy believers. Such is not the way of salvation, as we all know. Salvation is based on faith, not works (Ephesians 2:8-10). The inaction of these self-fulfilled, selfish non-Christians toward destitute believers only serves to reveal they are not inheritors of the messianic kingdom and heaven. What will their destiny be? Eternal punishment. What will be the destiny of those who love Jesus? Eternal life.

There are always two types of people with two destinies. They are among us right now. One is destined for perpetual punishment, one for perpetual bliss. One is a goat. One is a sheep. Which one are you? In your mind's eye right now you are in a long line of people. A sparkling, brilliant throne is located on a hill in front of you. As you approach it, you hear the words, "Goat, goat, sheep, goat, goat, goat, goat, sheep ..." while seeing these people fading either to the left or to the right of the throne of the One seated on the throne. When you shuffle up before the One who created the cosmos by the Word of His mouth, who died for the sins all mankind, who rose victorious over the grave, what classification will He give you?

On that day there will be no second chances. Right now, however, things are different. Right now, goats have the opportunity to become sheep at the feet of Jesus, the Savior.