

# Matthew 25:34

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*The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats: “The Second Judgment: The Reward of the Righteous.” Jesus says that the King will address the righteous sheep after they have been sorted to His right. He will call them “blessed of My Father” and invite them to inherit the kingdom that was prepared from them from the foundation of the world. This is the second of three judgments the parable describes.*

This parable has no apparent parallel in the other gospel accounts.

TheBibleSays commentary has subdivided the parable of *the Sheep and the Goats* and its subsequent elaboration (Matthew 25:31-46) according to the outline below. To better facilitate continuity and cohesion, the entire passage of this teaching is included in the Biblical text at the bottom and its words are italicized throughout these portions of commentary even if they do not appear in this specific portion of scripture.

This portion of the commentary focuses on Matthew 25:34—“The Second Judgment: The Reward of *the Righteous*.”

**Matthew 25:31-46**    **The Context of the Parable**

**Matthew 25:31**        **The Opening Remark**

**Matthew 25:32-33**    **The First Judgment: Sorting the Sheep from the Goats**

**Matthew 25:34**        **The Second Judgment: The Reward of the Righteous**

**Matthew 25:35-40**    **The Life Choices of the Righteous**

**Matthew 25:41**        **The Third Judgment: The Banishment of the Accursed**

**Matthew 25:42-45**    **The Life Choices of the Accursed**

**Matthew 25:46**        **The Closing Remark**

## **THE SECOND JUDGMENT: THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS**

After making *His* initial remark, where *He* sorted *the sheep from the goats*, Jesus now begins to deal with a second judgment within the parable, the judgment of *the sheep*,

*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 word, *Then*, in this passage may be subtle, but it is important. It signifies that the previous judgment has been completed and that something new is about to happen.

### **The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats describes three judgments.**

The first judgment sorts *the Sheep and the Goats*. That is, it sorts who believes in Jesus and has *eternal life* and is a member of God's *eternal* family. This is clearly a judgment with the stakes of *eternal life* or *eternal* death. This is determined solely on the basis of faith and not works (John 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:8-9).

Once this first judgment is complete *then* two more judgments will take place. And these judgments will respectively evaluate the deeds of both *the sheep* and *the goats*. The second judgment, which we will deal with in this section, is the judgment of *the sheep*.

*Then* after the sorting has taken place *the King will judge the sheep on His right*. This is the second judgment of the parable. It is the Bema of Christ described in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.

This is the judgment that is described in all three of the *Lord's* previous trio of parables: the Master evaluating *His* slaves to see whether or not they were faithful or wicked (Matthew 24:46-51); the Bridegroom celebrating with the wise bridesmaids at *His* wedding, while shutting out the foolish bridesmaids who did not prepare themselves (Matthew 25:1-13); the Master settling the accounts with *His* slaves to see how they invested the money *He* entrusted to them (Matthew 25:14-30).

*Then the King will also judge those goats on His left*. This is the third judgment. Apparently, in addition to being condemned for their unbelief (John 3:18), unbelievers will also be judged for their works. This judgment is described in the book of Jude.

“Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of *His* holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”  
(Jude 1:14b—15)

The first judgment where *sheep* are separated *from goats* is about whether or not a person believed in Jesus as the Son of God, and has nothing to do with works. The second and third judgments judge the deeds of *the sheep*, and the deeds of *the goats*. These second and third judgments are an evaluation of *the extent* of their works.

Some of the main questions that appear to be judged as criteria at the Bema Judgement of Christ are:

- To what *extent* did the believers/*sheep* live by faith?
- To what *extent* did they produce good fruit?
- To what *extent* did they invest the talents their Master entrusted to them (Matthew 25:14-30)?

- To what *extent* did they trust Jesus and follow His commands?
- To what *extent* were they merciful to others (Matthew 18:23-35)?
- To what *extent* was their faith put to good use and to what *extent* was it as good as dead (James 2:14-26)?
- To what *extent* did they overcome the trials of life and live as faithful witnesses, who did not buckle to fear of loss, rejection or death (Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26-28; 3:5; 3:12).

Some of the main questions of the Judgment of the *Unrighteous Goats* are:

- To what *extent* did unbelievers/*goats* disobey God's commandments?
- To what *extent* did the goats exploit others?
- To what *extent* did *the goats not* love or serve others?

The Bible often speaks of God's judgment of people's works.

"For You recompense a man according to his work."  
(Psalm 62:12b)

"God, who will render to each person according to his deeds."  
(Romans 2:5b-6)

"It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."  
(Hebrews 9:27)

These second and third judgments described in this parable are most likely the judgment witnessed and prophesied by John in Revelation:

"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."  
(Revelation 20:12)

Peter seems to validate this parable's order of second and third judgments in 1 Peter 4:17-18. "The judgment [will] begin with the household of God... first" and then the unrighteous will be judged.

It seems that there will be many feasts, banquets and celebrations inaugurating the Messiah's Kingdom and Christ's marriage to *His* bride. Similarly, it appears that there will be multiple judgments *when the Son of Man first comes*. And this parable of *the Sheep and Goats* seems to describe three of these judgments.

## **The King**

*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.'*

Jesus refers to *the Son of Man* as *the King*. *The King* is *the King* of kings (Revelation 19:16). *The King* is the Messiah that God promised to Israel. The Messiah was to be a Prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18); a Priest like Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4); and *a King* like David (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Throughout this parable and its explanations, Jesus is *the Son of Man*; *the Shepherd*; and *the King*.

All three of these terms, *Son of Man*, *Shepherd*, and *King* were clear Messianic references, and the last two terms are clear allusions to King David, who was first a shepherd before he became a king. Ezekiel 34:23-34 beautifully portrays the Messiah as a Shepherd King in the line of David.

One of Matthew's main objectives in writing his gospel was to demonstrate to his (likely Jewish) audience that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew repeatedly exhibits Christ's likeness to Moses and David in particular. And that is what Matthew is doing here by recording Jesus revealing Himself as the Messianic *King* (like David).

The image of *the Son of Man* sitting as *the King on His glorious throne* is one of sheer awe. No one is more powerful or important in the entire cosmos than *the King*. Even though this is always true, this reality will be intensely felt and inescapably apparent at this particular moment (Philippians 2:10-11). *The King's* opinion and words *will* matter a great deal to everyone. And *when He* calls your name, you *will* keenly listen to what *He will say* to you. However, this mighty *King* will also be human; the term *Son of Man* has a dual meaning, referring both to Jesus as Messiah as well as to Jesus as a human (Philippians 2:5-10).

After the judgment of sorting *the sheep and the goats* has taken place, *the King will address the sheep* who are *on His right*.

### ***The Sheep on His right***

*The King will bid them to Come*. This could mean anything from an invitation to personally draw close to *Me*, to approach *My throne*, to enter *My Kingdom* or it could mean all of these things.

*The King will address the sheep on His right as you who are blessed of My Father*. King Jesus's *Father* is God, *the Father*.

The phrase, *you who are blessed of My Father*, applies to all *the sheep*.

The entire flock of *sheep are* highly praised by God *the Father*. The Greek term translated as *blessed* is "Eulogehō." This is not the same term for *blessed* that was used in the Beatitudes ("Makarios") (Matthew 5:3-11), and therefore it should not be confused with it. "Makarios" describes a state of total fulfillment. "Eulogehō" means to commend with great respect and admiration. The English word "eulogy" comes from this Greek term. "Eulogehō" is a compound word that means "good" ("eu") "speaking" ("logehō"). The word means to "speak well of," to "praise" or "applaud."

A more literal translation of this term in this passage might be *you who are highly praised of my Father*. It was the same word that the multitudes use to describe Jesus, when they quoted Psalm

118 as He triumphantly road into Jerusalem as the Messiah a few days prior: “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed (“Eulogehō”) is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9). It is interesting to consider that as the people cheered and praised the Messiah, God the *Father* will cheer and praise the *sheep*. All those who are *His* will be *blessed*, as contrasted with the treatment that will be had by the *goats*.

In this particular instance, it does not appear that Jesus has separated the *sheep*, who are *His* servants, into faithful and unfaithful servants, as in the previous trio of parables. The emphasis in this final parable seems to be on the contrast between those who are of *His* flock (*sheep*) and those who are not (*goats*). This seems to emphasize that EVERY believer who has trusted in Jesus is, by the very fact of being in Christ, incredibly *blessed* as compared to those who are not in Christ (*goats*) (Romans 8:1). All those who are in Christ receive the gift of eternal life and belonging to *His* family. They have God as Father, and will be *blessed* by *Him*.

After making the consequences for believers if they are wicked, foolish, and/or lazy clear to the disciples in the previous three parables, Jesus reassures them. *He* reassures them that if they fail *Him*, *He* will never fail them. In this parable, *He* calls every single one of *His sheep*, “*blessed*.” This includes those who are like the wicked slaves who exploit others (Matthew 24:48). It includes those who are like the foolish bridesmaids who do not prepare themselves for the Bridegroom’s arrival (Matthew 24:3). And it includes those who are like the lazy servant who buries the talent *His* Master entrusted to him, and who was demoted of responsibility (Matthew 25:18, 26).

Those parables all show the importance of living a life pleasing to God and the consequences for not doing so as believers. This parable shows, among other things, the *blessed* truth that everyone who believes in Jesus will eternally belong in God’s family.

We know the importance Jesus placed on faithfulness by the fact that Jesus gave three parables to underscore the vast importance of not missing the once-in-an-existence opportunity to live as stewards by faith. But like a Master teacher, Jesus ends the quartet of parables with a reassuring teaching of certainty that all who receive *Him* will be *blessed*, and are a part of *His* family.

The phrase *you who are blessed of My Father* indicates that *the sheep on His right* belong to *His Father*. It indicates that they have belonging in God’s *eternal* family. Previously in *His* ministry, when Jesus was confronted and asked if *He* was the Messiah, *He* answered:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” (John 10:27—29)

*The sheep* have *eternal life* in Christ and in the *Father* that can never be lost or taken from them. The reason they have *eternal life* is because *the sheep* have believed in Jesus as God in human form. Because they had received *Him* by faith, God “gave (them) the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in *His* name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

Just as they were born *of God*, they *are blessed* (praised) *of My Father*—both phrases indicate they have received the gift of *eternal life* and belonging to God's family. That means that all the *sheep* are everlasting members of the *Father's* family.

Jesus made it clear that all that was required to receive this amazing blessing was to have enough faith to look upon Jesus (raised on the cross) hoping to be delivered from the venomous poison of sin, just as Israel looked upon the bronze snake (raised on a pole) hoping to be delivered from the venomous poison of snakes (John 3:14-16). This simple faith is sufficient to become a member of Jesus's flock of *sheep*, and makes it certain that anyone who so believes will be blessed to be a member of that flock, regardless of their deeds.

That our deeds matter to Jesus was made clear by the first trio of parables. But those deeds have nothing to do with being spiritually born again. Just as being born physically is a gift apart from our deeds, so is spiritual birth (John 3:3; 14-16). That Jesus began with a trio of parables highlighting the importance to God of faithful deeds emphasizes this point. But Jesus ends with a reminder that all who believe upon *Him* will be blessed, and all who do not will condemn themselves.

How does this *sheep and goats* parable, that is absent chastisement toward the sheep, fit with the previous trio of parables, where the unfaithful servant was chastised? The chastisement of the Lord is only given to those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:5-6; Revelation 3:19). The unfaithful servants in the first three parables are still *blessed* to be the Master's servants. Part of this is confirmed by the fact that they receive *His* chastening.

Romans tells us that all believers, all *sheep* have a destiny to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). That means all believers will be blessed. What is at stake is *the extent* or level of blessing they will receive. The faithful servants will be *blessed* immensely beyond what we can even conceive (1 Corinthians 2:9). That Jesus began with the trio of parables emphasizing the importance of being faithful stewards shows the immense importance to believers of taking full advantage of this amazing opportunity. Jesus does not want us to regret having missed this great opportunity we have to be faithful stewards while we await *His* return.

All believers (*sheep*) are *blessed* because they are in Christ. God is the inheritance of all believers (Romans 8:17a). But only believers who suffer the sufferings of Christ will receive the reward of reigning with Christ, fully entering the joy of their Master (Romans 8:17b).

### ***The Kingdom Prepared for you from the foundation of the World***

After *the King* addresses and bids *the sheep* to come, *He* will grant them their inheritance. He tells them to *Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*.

What is *the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*?

In short, it is the divine destiny for believers in Jesus.

God created human beings with an *eternal* purpose (Ecclesiastes 3:11). And humans exercise their purpose through their creative influence. A biblical term for creative influence is “dominion.” An essential aspect of being made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27) is that we are like *Him* in key respects (freedom to make choices, to love, and to reason). We were created to do some of the things *He* does—like create and rule. Human beings are both creatures made by God and co-creators with God.

When God created man and woman, *He* gave *them* dominion over the entire creation (Genesis 1:28). And *He* asked *them* to manage and cultivate the garden of Eden. *He* gave *them* the task to improve *His* good creation to become even better by partnering with *Him*. As some have observed, grain and grapes are good, but the human energy invested to improve grain and grapes to bread and wine are very good. And it is human creativity and dominion that refines the very good from the original raw good.

Humans were given the reign of the earth, and were chosen above the angels, who are a higher order of creatures. God apparently took this unusual step in order to silence Satan ([see commentary on Psalm 8:2](#)). When humanity fell, apparently Satan gained the rule of the earth again (John 12:31, 14:30). Jesus has defeated Satan. All authority has been granted to *Him* (Matthew 28:18). And when *the Son of Man* returns, *He* will establish *His* reign of the earth. But Jesus will also include with *Him* in His reign all those faithful servants who overcome as *He* overcame (Revelation 3:21; Philippians 2:5-10; Romans 8:17b; 2 Timothy 2:12).

Activities that tend the earth, and create human benefit from the earth, and many others, are all part of God’s plan for man. Humanity’s story begins in a garden (Genesis 2) and culminates in a city that contains a garden (Revelation 21:10-27).

But it is not just this *world* where man has been destined to rule on behalf of and in partnership with *the King*. It will be the New Heaven and the New Earth as well (Revelation 21:24). The *Father* planned all of this before *the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:3-5).

*The kingdom* is this future destiny and future dominion. It is the future creative influence that we were created to have and exercise. This *world* is not our home. This *world* is not our forever career. This *world* is not our destiny. Our true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and the culmination of human history is for heaven to come to earth, for God to dwell upon the earth with *His* people (Revelation 21:1-3).

Our destiny is found and fulfilled by working in Christ’s unshakable *kingdom* (Hebrews 12:28). This kingdom begins now, and occurs when we walk by faith, flowing the resurrection power of Jesus into the world.

It is in the New Jerusalem that we will walk as triumphant kings in the good works which God *prepared* beforehand with unmixed satisfaction and joy (Ephesians 2:10; Revelation 21:25).

This parable of *the Sheep and Goats* emphasizes the immense blessing that all of God’s people will have by virtue of being a part of *His* family.

The first trio of parables make it clear that our fullest experience of blessing in *His* kingdom depends upon *the extent* to which we strive by faith to be the best possible steward during this life. Do we embrace God's ways by faith, or do we reject *His* ways in exchange for the fleeting pleasures and honors of this world? Will we follow *the King* and promote *His kingdom* as we live on earth, as though we are in heaven? Or will we deny *the King* as we cobble together our petty, worldly fiefdoms that are doomed to collapse?

In a general sense *the kingdom* that believers *inherit* is a part of their *eternal* reward. The core of this kingdom is the *King* Himself; God is the inheritance of all believers (Romans 8:17a).

The extent of a believer's eternal reward depends upon their faithfulness (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who suffer the sufferings of Christ will also share *His* reward (Romans 8:17b). But, as this parable emphasizes, all believers are blessed to be in God's family.

(To learn more about the difference between the Gift of *Eternal Life* and Inheriting *the Kingdom* please see "[What is Eternal Life? How to gain the Gift of Eternal Life.](#)")

This seems to be the principle emphasized in Jesus's parable of the *Sheep and the Goats*. It follows that knowing that our acceptance by God, given to us unconditionally, is the firm foundation for the first three parables, which emphasize our accountability to God. Our responsibility is real, and the consequences of our choices reverberate in eternity.

We *inherit the kingdom* by having a faith that compels us to do things like giving the *hungry something to eat*—giving the *thirsty something to drink*—inviting the *stranger* to sit at your table—visiting the *prisoner* in his cell—and clothing the *naked*.

As indicated by this parable of the *sheep*, the believer's eternity with God is beyond all question. If we believed (i.e. died) with *Him*, we will also live forever with *Him* (2 Timothy 2:11). And if we are faithless, *He* always remains faithful, and *He* will never deny us our *eternal life* that we have through *His* Son because *He* cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

The first trio of parables emphasizes that a believer's destiny of reward in *the kingdom* is not a foregone conclusion. Our reward can be inherited or lost (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Timothy 2:12). The Master will return and reward the faithful and punish the unfaithful children (Matthew 25:19-30). The current passage dealing with Jesus's separation of *the sheep from the goats* connects the parable of the *sheep* back to the first trio of parables, and elevates the reality of rewards.

This experience of life is what it means to enter and *inherit the kingdom*. This is what it means to fulfill and experience the glorious destiny that the *Father* has *prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:3-5; 2:10).

Every believer has the great opportunity to rest in the reality that God's acceptance of us as *His sheep* is wholly unconditional. We belong to *Him* because of what Jesus did, without reliance upon anything we may do. This is the message of the parable of the *sheep*.



It is our great privilege and immense benefit to seek first *His kingdom* and *His* righteousness, so that all these good things will be added unto us (Matthew 6:33). This is the message of the first trio of parables dealing with the accountability believers will have before Jesus of their stewardship while living upon earth.

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>31</sup> “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> 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; <sup>33</sup> and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> “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. <sup>35</sup> 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; <sup>36</sup> naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? <sup>39</sup> When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ <sup>40</sup> 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.’ <sup>41</sup> “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; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; <sup>43</sup> 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.’ <sup>44</sup> 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?’ <sup>45</sup> 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.’ <sup>46</sup> These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”