

Matthew 25:42-45

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-25/matthew-2542-45/>

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats: “The Life Choices of the Accursed.”
The King will explain how their punishment was for the way they did not serve Him when He was destitute during their lives on earth. The accursed will ask when they ever refused to serve Him. The King will reply that to the extent they did not serve others, it was counted as if they did not serve Him.

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 25:41-45—“The Life Choices of *the Accursed*.”

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 LIFE CHOICES OF THE ACCURSED

The King will say to the goats on His left: “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; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.”

First *the King* separated the believers (*sheep*) from the unbelievers (*goats*) as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. This was the first of three judgments described in this passage on the Parable of *the Sheep and the Goats*.

And then *the King* judged the believers (*the sheep on His right*) and rewarded them for their good works. And *He* explained to *them* what their good works were. They sacrificially served people to meet their most basic needs. These humble acts of love deeply touched *the King* and were highly praised (*blessed*) of *His Father*.

To the extent that they loved people, they loved *the King* (The way we follow the first commandment of Loving God, is to follow His second, which is to love others—Matthew 22:37-40). And they were compensated with a *kingdom prepared for them* in the New Heaven and the New Earth. This was the second judgment described in this passage of *the Sheep and the Goats* and it focused on the rewards given to *the sheep*.

And then *the King* judged the unbelievers (*the goats on His left*) for their lack of good works. *He* banished them to *the eternal fire prepared* (not for them) but for *the Devil and his angels*. This began the third and final judgment described in this passage on *the Sheep and the Goats*, which is the judgment of *the goats*.

Just as *the King* explained to *the righteous sheep* about their good works, *the King* also explained to *the accursed goats* about their lack of good works.

This third judgment, describing *the Son of Man*'s evaluation of unbeliever's deeds, aligns with what other scriptures say will happen when *the Son of Man* returns:

- Everyone, including unbelievers will be judged according to their works (Psalm 62:12b; Romans 2:5b-6; Hebrews 9:27; Jude 1:14b-15; Revelation 20:12).
- God will judge members of *His* eternal "household" (believers) for their works "first;" and then *He* will judge those who ignored the gospel (unbelievers) (1 Peter 4:17-18).

After telling *the accursed goats* to "*Depart into the eternal fire,*" *the King* will say to those on *His left* and recount how *they* were disobedient in their life.

He will say: "*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; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.*"

These actions that *the unrighteous* (*goats*) did not do are the same six actions that *the righteous* (*sheep*) did do. As mentioned in the Matthew 25:35-40 commentary about the life choices of the righteous, all six actions address deeply human needs: food, drink; shelter; clothing; health; and friendship. The listing of six human needs is symbolic of humanity, as six is a number that often represents man in scripture.

But instead of giving *the King* something to eat when *He* was hungry or visiting *Him* in prison as *the sheep* had done, these *goats* did nothing.

And just as *the righteous sheep* were puzzled and questioned *the King* when did they ever served *Him*, so too are *the accursed goats* bewildered and question *the King* when had *they* passed an opportunity to serve *Him*.

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?'

It is worth noting that *the accursed goats* who made themselves God's enemies will acknowledge in this moment that *He* is "Lord" (Philippians 2:10-11).

The King's reply to *the goats* is likewise similar to what *He* told *His sheep*.

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.'

Again, the phrase, *to the extent*, indicates a matter of degree and shows how this is an evaluation of *the goats'* deeds. (Just as it was when *the King* previously evaluated *the sheep's deeds*). God does not consider *the extent* of our works in regards to whether or not a person has received the gift of *eternal life*. A person either believed in Jesus and has received the gift of *eternal life* or a person has not believed in Jesus and has not received the gift of *eternal life*. This simple faith and the receiving of *eternal life* by pure grace is completely binary. There is no "to the extent" about it. The *extent* of deeds determines the degree of rewards.

The outcome of the unbelieving goats' judgment is categorically bad. And the entire range of outcomes within this category range from bad to worse. There is no good that *the goats* will receive at this judgment. *They* all are banished *into the eternal fire*. No good awaits them there. Though it appears it will be worse for some than others based on *the extent* to which unbelievers *did not* love and serve people—including *the least of these*. Even *not serving one* may make it worse.

***The King's* evaluation of the unbelievers' (goats) works reveals at least three things.**

First, *the King's* evaluation reveals how every choice that every individual matters exponentially more than we tend to realize. This includes the choices of unbelievers. The way unbelievers treat people matters a great deal to *the King*. And whether *they* realize it or not, at their judgment it will matter a great deal to *them* as well. But at that point it will be too late for *them* to make better choices.

The works of unbelievers do not qualify or disqualify *them* from being in God's family—only God's grace can make us sons and *brothers of the King*. And God's gift of *eternal life* is received through faith in Jesus Christ alone and has nothing to do with our works (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). Receiving Jesus Christ is to receive *His* sacrifice, accomplished for us, apart from our efforts.

This depiction of God's judgment of *the goats'* works serves as a reminder that disobedience to God in all its forms stores up wrath in our day of judgment (Romans 2:5-6).

Second, *the King's* evaluation of unbelievers' deeds reveals that it is not only things done that matter to God (whether good or bad). Also things undone (whether good or bad) also matter to *Him*. These *goats* were not rebuked for what they did. They were rebuked for what they left undone. They saw people in need but did not act.

Both these *goats* and the desperate people *they* saw were made in God's image. The moral image of God within *the goats* should have been sufficient for *them* to act with mercy and compassion upon their fellow image bearers. *The goats* and the afflicted they ignored share a common humanity and dignity through their common Creator. And yet *the goats* did not provide food or *drink*, or invite, clothe, tend, or visit their fellow humans in their time of suffering. *For not* doing what *they* ought to have done, *the goats will be* judged.

The Bible teaches that everyone will be held accountable for what they choose not to do.

Solomon reminds us, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it" (Proverbs 3:27) and, "Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back,

and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you" (Proverbs 3:28).

And James teaches: "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

As does the Apostle John:

"But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

(1 John 3:17-18)

The third thing *the King's* reply reveals is that ignorance does not excuse sin. The fact that *the goats* did *not* know that *they* were serving *the King* if *they* served *the King's* brothers does not get them off the hook. *The King* never disputed their ignorance. He disputed their disobedience.

It is in our nature to sin. People frequently sin and fail to perceive their offense to God. Even believers who have God's Spirit habitually sin. John tells the readers of his first epistle, that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). But if confess the sins that we are aware of, Jesus does not hold them against us, and He cleanses us of all unrighteousness which includes the sins we don't know of and therefore are unable to confess (1 John 1:9). David prays in the Psalms for God to forgive even his hidden faults (Psalm 19:12).

God will judge everyone perfectly. *He* knows everything about every internal and external factor of the temptations we encounter. And just as the Master entrusted his wealth to each slave "according to his ability" in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:15, one of the first trio of parables in this chapter), God *will* consider a person's external and internal circumstances, capabilities, and opportunities in *His* judgment of every individual (Hebrews 4:12). And *He will* do so with perfect justice as only God can do. But disobedience is disobedience. And sin is sin,

regardless whether we consider it is wrong. We will be judged and held accountable for everything we chose to do as well as everything we chose *not* to do.

Biblical Text

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. 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. 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. 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ 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.’ 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.”