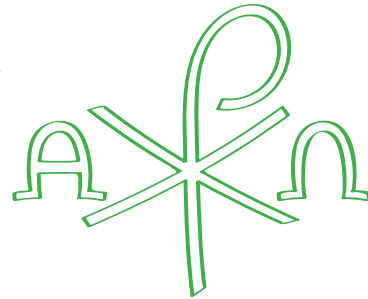


THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER

TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

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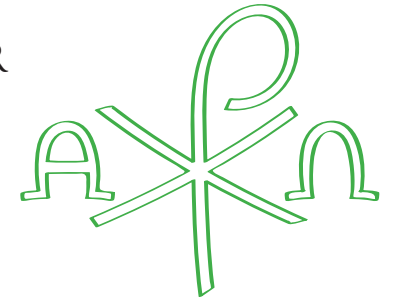


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MATTHEW 25:31-46 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused Matthew Levi the apostle to record these words around AD 50. This reading comes from the last major discourse of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel and teaches us about Christ's separation of the sheep and the goats.

³¹ [Jesus said,] "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

- "Son of Man" – Jesus uses this term for Himself around 80 times in the Gospels. As a messianic title, it combines the ideas of a servant who will suffer and die for all people (Isaiah 53; Matthew 20:28), and the exalted Son of Man, who will reign forever (Deuteronomy 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30).
- Daniel 7:13, the Old Testament reading for the day, says, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him." Daniel depicts the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven; now, Matthew depicts Christ's returning in glory and *sitting* on his glorious throne. Daniel teaches of the Son of Man who is to come; Matthew teaches of the Son of Man who will come to be our judge.

³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

- We learn that although the world divides itself into endless groups, races, and people, God divides the world into two people: sheep and goats, that is, Christians and heathens. This remains true although it offends the world. Dr. Franz Pieper says it this way:

"Men do not want to put Christianity and all other religions into diametrical opposition, do not want religions divided into essentially different classes. And so they are searching, particularly in these modern days, for a 'general concept of religion,' a definition of religion so wide and all-embracing that it expresses the nature both of the heathen religions and of the Christian religions into one genus, one class. But when these definitions which are supposed to cover both Christianity and paganism are closely examined, it is clear that men are simply using a common name to designate entirely different things. ... The 'older theologians,' therefore, must not be faulted, but rather commended for maintaining that there are but two different religions, that the Christian religion is in a class by itself, and that all non-Christian religions belong in the class of 'false religions,' from which mean need to be delivered through the Christian religion" (*Christian Dogmatics* I:10, 13).

- The language of this text recalls Psalm 23, the Lord as our Shepherd. In this text, the Lord separates the goats who do not belong to Him from the sheep who do.

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

- This text is many times thought to be teaching works righteousness, as if the King receives the sheep *because* of their good works. But verse 34 teaches the exact opposite—The sheep are sheep because they are blessed by the Father. Even more, this verse teaches us that the sheep did not "earn" or "merit" the kingdom of heaven; rather, they *inherited* the kingdom (See Galatians 3:18; Hebrews 1:2; Romans 8:17; Colossians 1:12). After counting those on His right as sheep, then He recounts their deeds.

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- In addition to this, the kingdom of heaven was prepared “for you” from the foundation of the world. This teaches that it could not have been earned by the sheep, but it was chosen for them before creation. This text teaches eternal election, that is, that God elected us before the foundation of the world for salvation through faith in Christ. Ephesians 1:4 says, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

- Ephesians 1:4 states that on account of our election in Christ, we would be holy and blameless before Him. Notice that the only works recounted of the sheep are good works; the sins of God’s people are not recalled. This is a direct fulfillment of Isaiah 43:25: “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (See also, Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 10:17; Micah 7:18-19; Psalm 25:7). Therefore, in the final judgment, Christ will not recall any evil works of His sheep, but only praise them for their good works. This text also teaches that good works are the result of salvation, not its cause.

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

- Note that what is shocking to the sheep is not that they did these works—as if they had no recollection of ever feeding, helping, or visiting anyone. Their question is not “When did we do these things?” but “When did we do these things *for you*?” The Christian remembers His good works. Yet, here, Christ reveals that we serve our Lord by serving our neighbor.

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

- The goats receive the exact opposite judgment from the sheep. To the sheep God says, “Come”; to the goats, “Depart.” To the sheep He says, “you who are blessed”; to the goats, “you cursed.” To the sheep He says, “inherit the kingdom prepared for you”; to the goats, “to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his

angels.” We learn that hell was never created for man; rather, it was created for the devil and his angels. The reason any human being is in hell is not because God has desired, chosen, or predestined them to suffer in hell. The reason human beings are in hell is because they have chosen to reject God and follow Satan and his devils. This text only teaches the eternal election of the saints—single predestination, not double predestination as John Calvin falsely taught.

⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

- Although the unbeliever does many works that appear to be good before the eyes of man, they are not good works. Why? Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.” Since the goats have no faith, they also have no good works—Christ counts no good works in them; rather, He judges their every work to be evil.
- Christians should rejoice in this beautiful text! Here, Christ teaches us that He will fulfill His promise—He promises to judge us not according to our sins but according to His righteousness. The goats have nothing good attributed to them because they have no faith. The sheep have nothing evil attributed to them because Christ has forgiven their every sin! How will Christ judge His saints on the Final Day? “Now God has reconciled you by Christ’s body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him” (Colossians 1:22).

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