

Sermon: Do the goats know they are goats?

Reading: Matthew 25: 31- 46

Introduction:

This Sunday in the church calendar it is known as, 'The feast of Christ the King'. As we read the opening passage of today's Gospel we are treated to an amazing picture of God enthroned on high in glory and all the angels are with Him (**Matt 25:31**). What a spectacular picture Jesus presents to us, as we gaze on in awe and wonder. As we capture a glimpse into the magnificence of the heavenly temple, we can be sure one day we shall see it for ourselves. The question we need to be sure of when He calls out our name is, will we be on His right or on His left?

Context

Jesus is seated on the Mt of Olives speaking with His disciples when they came and asked Him what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age? (Matt 24:3). The parables that follow and the one we are focussing in on today are all linked to the question the disciples asked Jesus and should be read together.

The King takes His seat

As Jesus shares with the disciples this tremendous vision of what is still to come, we can't help but wonder how shocking the events of that Day will be for many! Jesus tells us this will be the time when the nations are gathered before the throne of God. No nation or people will be missing on that Day. Every one will be gathered together and every eye will behold the King. As the King sits upon His throne we can be sure there will be no mistakes. The people will not be canvassed as an electorate, no election campaign will have been run, there was no casting of votes for a democratic process. There will be no need to count votes and the only cross that matters is that of Christ. Before The King, every knee will bow and the heavenly angels worship.

Scriptural History

The judging of the nations is nothing new. God has revealed His mighty arm many times through Biblical history. He has raised up nations for His glory and brings them to nought when they become rebellious and wicked. We read throughout the Scriptures where rebellious nations all come under God's eye and are warned they will face His wrath if they continue in their wickedness. Kings, rulers, governors and priests do not escape, those caught in sin are brought low. When the warnings from prophets has gone unheeded, God pronounces devastating judgment upon wicked nations bringing them to nothing. The great city of Nineveh was humbled and brought to repentance; the might of Babylon came crashing down after Belshazzar saw the finger of God inscribed the words, 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN' in the walls of his palace (**Dan 5:25**). Tyre and Sidon no longer exist as influential places of trade and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are no more. These catastrophic collapses of wicked cities and great empires should cause us to tread carefully in this world. For God will have the last word and He will not be mocked. He will bring all nations and peoples before His throne.

Future history

A Day is set aside when all nations and peoples will see the King and they will be separated, one from another, some on His Right and others on His left. The separations will be simple and swift. We will be separated like a shepherd separate the sheep from the goats.

Identity of the King

This shocks many. In fact when was the last time you heard a sermon preached on this passage in this way? What will shock even more is when they discover the identity of the King of Heaven who sits upon the throne and brings the nations to judgment. Jesus will act as judge over believers and unbelievers. Jesus states He has been given the authority to judge by the

Father saying, 'Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, **23** that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him' (**John 5:22**). For those who say Islam and Christianity are comparable would have to dismiss this passage completely. Islam does not regard Jesus in this way. For Jesus is the one who holds the keys, remember Jesus said, 'No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14), Jesus has the keys to death and Hades (Rev 1:18). Didn't Jesus come to save I hear you say? Yes He did but with His coming, judgment also follows, Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (**John 9:39**).

How shocking is this to our modern sensibilities, of those who think all religions lead to God and the image of the gentle Jesus meek and mild! Jesus is King, Christ the King. We would do well to hold this Feast Day and reflect again on who Jesus truly is. For the Jesus identity pendulum has swung too far to the left and we have forgotten to whom we all must one day give an account. What concerns me is how can the church stand or the Christian stand who thinks it's ok to change doctrines and the Word of God to make the Scriptures fit with cultural norms and popular policies of our day? We must be careful we don't sound like the wicked servant in the parable of the talents who accused is master of being a harsh and unfair man. (**Matt 25:24**) that we buried your word!

All Angels gather

The opening words of our Scripture today are awesome. Read again the words, 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and **all** the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne' (**Matt 25:31**). What a spectacular sight to behold. When Jesus says, all angels will be gathered, have you ever given any thought to just how many this may be?

In Scripture we know only three angels by name, Gabriel who brings Mary the news she has been chosen to bear the Son of God. Then there is Michael is the archangel and Lucifer the fallen angel. However the Scriptures records angels 273 times in 34 books of Scripture. This alone implies there are far more than the famous three! We are introduced to the heavenly choir on the night Jesus was born into His creation. The angels marvelled at Christ and sang as bewildered shepherds watched their flocks on the hillside as they saw the glory of the heavenly choir. . The writer of Hebrews records there are, '.....thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly (**Heb 12:22**). And the book of Revelation records an amazing number of angels in worship with these words, 'Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne...' (**Rev 5:11**). What an extraordinary sight heaven holds, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemers praise. The glories of my God and King', (Charles Wesley).

The Throne

Revelation provides us with a glimpse into the throne room, recording a rainbow shinning like emerald which encircled the throne, a magnificent array of colours shining through the light encircling Him (**Rev 4:3**). From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumbling and pearls of thunder (**Rev 4:5**). Can you imagine the terrifying power of the One from whom lightening is emanating and when He speaks His voice thunders with a chest grabbing rumble. The tone of the voice is said to resemble that of many rushing waters or pearls of thunder, so much so that when He utters His voice the earth melts (**Psalms 46**), seas are calmed and winds cease.

Can you imagine the terrifying experience of standing before God's throne. It's not quite the imagined tea party on the lawn with the Queen many imagine. The thought of standing before the Jesus Christ as King, Almighty, All powerful, All knowing, Sovereign and surrounded by beauty, power and might of thousands upon thousands of angelic beings worshipping joyously singing, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty (**Isa 6**). Its hard to grasp fully the concept of that Day and the very thought of this should humble us as we discover whether we will be on the right hand of Jesus or on His left, just as a shepherd will separate the sheep from the goats.

Sheep and Goats

As I read this passage, I began to ponder if the goats (**Matt 25:33**) become confused as to their identity. Sheep and goats may live side by side, graze the same food and digest the same foods and even to the novice look similar. But do the goats know they are goats? This may sound a strange thought but bear with me.

On the Day of judgment as the people are separated, it seems the goats thought they were sheep! When they became discovered the reason they were standing on the other side of God's people they became confused and thought they were sheep! Don't we hear them say, 'Lord when did we see you hungry, or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' (**Matt 25:44**). They are troubled, bewildered and shocked for they knew if they had seen Jesus in need they would have helped, saying, 'When did we see you hungry, naked, thirsty, needing shelter (**Matt 25:38**). The answer Jesus gives, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (**Matt 25:40**).

Here is a question to ponder, when we find ourselves separated into one of these two groupings, on the right and on the left hand side of Jesus, And you can't remember which hand side the sheep were located, so you begin to look around the group to see who is also in your group. Who would you be looking out for in your group to confirm you are with the sheep? Would it be someone from your church? Who do you hope to be standing in the same group as who can confirm for you that you are in the right group?

Salvation not by works.

Many misunderstand and misinterpret this Scripture as salvation by works. But this thought actually goes against the Scriptures. James does say, 'Faith without works is dead,' so our faith should be producing good works as we serve Jesus, but good works will not be enough to save our eternal souls. To be saved we need a Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

Consider this, if an atheist who denies the very existence of God but as a person they are kind and generous, helping to feed the hungry and clothe the poor. On the Day of judgment will they be found in the grouping with the sheep? What do you think? If you think yes, would it be because of this passage? Some may argue saying we are all children of God, therefore God will save even those who don't believe because they are nice people!

The problem with this thinking (apart from it's not biblical) is what Jesus says to those who needed helping. When those on Jesus' left (goats) asked 'When did we ever see you in need?' The King says, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers/sisters of mine, you did for me,' (**Matt 25:40**). Notice Jesus is pointing to His sheep (His people) when He speaks of the least of these. His people could refer to Israel, the church or individual Christians. Jesus is pointing to His people, to be sure there is no confusion Jesus speaks of these people as His brothers/sisters. (**Matt 25:40**). Jesus is making a clear distinction here between those who are His family and those who are not. His people He calls brothers. Only those born of the Spirit can make claim of being a part of God's family, (**see John 1:12; 11:52; Rom 8:16; 1 John 3:1-10**). In Scripture the lost are never referred to as God's children. We only become God's children, which makes us 'brothers/sisters' of Jesus, when we are saved and adopted into God's family through our relationship with Jesus Christ, (**see Gal 4:5-6; Eph 1:5; Rom 8:14-17**). Those who are saved become children of God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (**Gal 3:26**).

Our invitation now and future

If you received an invitation from the Palace to attend the Queen's garden party, would you not be a little excited? We have been given an invitation to attend the King's palace. Do we know Jesus as Lord of our lives? Should we not be a little more excited when we come to worship and meeting for prayer, for Jesus says, 'My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me' (**John 10:27**). Now that is exciting, but whose voice are we listening to?

Christ the King is the celebration, when we consider the King, I don't think many have described the King as well as SM. Lockridge who offers us some amazing words for us to consider. I will leave you with some of the words he used to describe Jesus when he said.....

The Bible says He's the King of the Jews; the King of Israel; the King of Righteousness. He's the King of Heaven, He's the King of Glory. He's the King of Kings, and He's the Lord of Lords.

David said, "The Heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. No telescope can bring into visibility. No barrier can hinder

He's strong.

Sincere.

He's steadfast.

He's immortally graceful.

He's all powerful.

He's impartially merciful.

He's the greatest phenomenon that ever crossed the horizon of this world.

He's a sinner's Saviour..

He's the centrepiece dividing time

He's awesome.

He's unique.

He's unparalleled.

He's unprecedented.

He's the miracle of the age.

The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him.

Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him.

The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.

Herod couldn't kill Him.

Death couldn't handle Him,

And the grave couldn't hold Him.

I wonder if you know Him today?

He supplies strength for the weak.

He's available for the tempted and the tried.

He sympathises and He saves.

He strengthens and sustains.

He guards and He guides.

He heals the sick.

He cleanses lepers.

He forgives sinners.

He discharges debtors.

He delivers captives.

He defends the feeble.

He blesses the young.

Do you know Him, now is the time to get to know your King, for one day you will meet Him and what joy fills the heart of the true believer when at last our eyes will see the glorious King of eternity. **Amen.**