



Matthew 25:31–33

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Reflection

Over the next three days Jesus will bring his fifth and final discourse in Matthew's gospel to a climactic close. Matthew's gospel is precious, not just for the story of Jesus' life, but also for the way in which he's grouped together five sections of teaching, in the form of speeches given by Jesus, which cover many of the fundamental bases of the Christian faith.

In chapters 5 to 7 Jesus taught us about kingdom life in his famous Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 10 he gave us his missionary discourse. In Matthew 13 he taught us further about the kingdom of God, this time exclusively in parables (it's known as the parabolic discourse). Jesus' fourth discourse, found in Matthew 18, is all about the church. And over the past couple of weeks we've been working our

way through his fifth and final discourse. It's known as the Olivet discourse (Jesus gave it on the Mount of Olives), and its subject is the end times. Jesus began in Matthew 24 speaking about the fall of Jerusalem which in many ways is presented as a foretaste and a foreshadowing of what will happen at his Second Coming, which becomes the subject of the remainder of Matthew 24 and all of Matthew 25.

Today's passage marks the beginning of the end of Jesus' speech about the end times. It's also known as the great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2:31; Mal 4:5), the triumphant day that he will return to earth to judge the living and the dead. Today's passage forms the first third of a parable that represents Jesus' final word on his Second Coming. It's memorable,

beautiful, and deeply disturbing. It's also unique to Matthew's gospel, you'll only find it here, and it characteristically contains Matthew's emphasis on the importance of living a kingdom life in this world right through to the end.

Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking down upon Jerusalem. It's the end of long and confrontational day, Tuesday evening of the Passion week. On Friday morning at 9am Jesus will hang on the cross as a direct result of what he said and did in the temple earlier this day. Perhaps the disciples sensed that all this was coming. Just a few hours earlier Jesus was tearing strips off the Jewish religious leaders, exposing in public their private sins and hypocrisy. His disciples certainly would have seen the hatred in their eyes.

The end of the world would seem like a pretty appropriate topic after what went down in the temple that afternoon. And so they asked Jesus about signs that might accompany his Second Coming. Jesus then spoke to them at length about the sudden nature of his return, and the need to be vigilant and to make preparations. Now he turns to what the day will be like,

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

There’ll be no mistaking Jesus’ return. Glory. Thousands upon thousands of angels. And a throne. Sudden and unmistakable, like lightning that lights up the night sky from east to west; glory, thousands upon thousands of angels and a throne.

Do you notice that Jesus refers to himself in verse 31 as the Son of Man. As we've regularly noted it's Jesus' favourite term for himself. And in today's passage 'Son of Man' really comes into its own. Here's why. Whenever Jesus describes himself as the 'Son of Man' here's what he has in mind, this prophecy from Daniel 7:13–14:

13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that

will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This 'Son of Man' prophecy is all about the day that Jesus is describing in our passage. The end of days. Jesus' ultimate triumph, the full and final arrival of the kingdom of God. His unmistakable return. Glory. Thousands upon thousands of angels. A throne. And, from verse 32,

All the nations will be gathered before him,

Everyone one who has ever lived will be there. From every tribe and nation on earth. All gathered before his throne. The passage continues,

and he will separate the people one

from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

I love that even in this climatic heavenly scene Jesus remains so human, describing what will occur in familiar and easy to understand ways for his hearers. Sheep and goats. In Palestine, even today, just like in the photo on today's app, sheep and goats often run together, they're herded together, apparently the sheep even keep the goats warm at night. Take a look. Can you tell which ones are sheep and which ones are goats? They're completely different, but they can look very similar. Just like us. One day they will be separated. Just as one day all of humanity will be separated, starkly, as black and white. The sheep

will be on Jesus' right and the goats on his left. And forebodingly, in the Old Testament sheep often represent God's people. And goats, well, when they're mentioned they're usually associated with sacrifice.

It's a dramatic scene isn't? All of humankind divided down the middle, separated, not into a myriad of diverse groups, but simply into two. Sheep and goats. Right and left. Black and white. Members of the kingdom of God and members of the kingdom of the world standing in front of the king of kings and lord of lords returned to claim what is his own.

Think

I want you to meditate over this scene in your minds this morning. The climax of all

of human history, the climax of all of human achievement, the moment when every person to have ever walked this earth stands before their creator to give an account for the way they have lived the life that he gave them on the earth that is his. And it begins with him ominously dividing them down the middle. Feel the weight of this moment. Consider the glory contained in this moment. On which side will you stand? How 'even' do you think things will be? Will there be more sheep? Or more goats? Or far, far more goats?

Pray

Then pray. Pray about the day of the Lord. Pray that the time you've spent meditating over this day this morning will meaningfully change your day ahead. What differ-

ence does it make? What difference will it make? Pray also for God's flock, that they would stand strong in this world. Life may be hard but something truly great and eternal awaits us. It may not always feel like it but Jesus is ruling and reigning right now and one day soon the Son of Man will return in glory and power. It will be the greatest of days for those of us who believe. Pray also for the goats, that as we run with them, and as we live life beside them, we might influence them for Christ and love and serve them into his kingdom.