



## **Matthew 24:34–40**

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation 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 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison

and you came to visit 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 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

## **Reflection**

Yesterday we began the parable of the sheep and the goats. It’s the last recorded teaching of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel. And what a dramatic ending it makes. Je-

Jesus has returned in glory. The Son of Man is seated on the throne of his kingdom. Except that he's the Son of Man no more, he's the King, the King of kings and Lord of lords come to claim what is rightfully his. All of humankind are called before him. And then, dramatically, he divides them down the middle. Separated, not into a myriad of diverse groups but simply into two. The sheep and goats. On his right and his left. It's black and white. There's no middle ground. On Jesus' right are gathered the members of the kingdom of God and on his left are the members of the kingdom of this world.

This day marks the climax of all human history, the climax of all human achievement. It's the moment when every person to have ever walked the earth stands be-

fore their creator to give an account for the way that they have lived the life that he gave them on the earth that is his. And this day begins ominously with Jesus dividing them down the middle.

In today's passage Jesus addresses those on his right. In tomorrow's passage he will speak to those on his left. Today, to those on his right the King, Jesus says,

‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Jesus addresses his sheep, the members of the kingdom of God, the universal church gathered in all her splendour, men and women who've died in faith, multi-

tudes of Christians from every tribe and nation throughout all of human history are addressed by their king. Can you imagine them there, billions of Christians, multitudes upon multitudes gathered before Jesus at the end of days? He blesses them with their inheritance, eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus doesn't need to offer a reason, they've been saved by faith. But he does, he continues in verse 35,

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 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Now when we read this it puzzles us. If we're saved by grace alone through faith alone and not by anything that we've done or earned (Eph 2:8–9), then why does Jesus give these reasons for welcoming his sheep into his eternal kingdom? It puzzles us, and it puzzles them also. They reply to Jesus,

‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

Jesus' answer holds the key to both their understanding and ours.

‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Jesus is saying words to this effect, ‘Come you who are blessed, come you who are righteous, enter the kingdom of heaven for all eternity, because of your faith which you proved to be genuine by the way you lived in my world. You were saved by faith alone but genuine saving faith is never alone. Faith changes lives. Faith transforms people. And genuine saving faith is always followed by love and good deeds. You might not remember the times when you gave food and drink to your brothers and sisters in need, but I do. You might not remember the times when you sacrificed your time and money to put clothes on the

backs and food in the mouths and books and bibles in the classrooms of Christians in third world countries, but I do. You might not remember the nursing home visits, or the cancer ward visits or the kind words that you spoke on the anniversary of the passing of Beryl's husband, but I do. I remember every word, every act of charity, every sacrifice you've made, every late night washing dishes after you've fed your bible study group who meets weekly in your home. I remember it all because when you did it for them you were doing it for me. Your faith has saved you and been a blessing to my world. So come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

This scene could easily bring tears to your



eyes. The whole Christian church is standing before Jesus, humbly not understanding and barely even remembering the countless small ways that they've glorified him in the world. But Jesus is remembering every single moment, every act of generosity, every act of compassion, every act of love that they extended to the family of God, and he's revealing to them that how they've loved each other is not only the measure of their faith but also the measure of their love for him.

## **Think & Pray**

These verses move us to more fully express our love of Jesus and our faith in him by doing good for the whole family of God. 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat' – today, in 2016, there

are more than 200 million Christians in our world who are malnourished every day. 'I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink' – nearly a billion people in our world don't have access to clean drinking water, many of them are Christians. 'I was a stranger and you invited me in', Christian refugees, fleeing the middle east in their tens of thousands. 'I needed clothes and you clothed me', under-privileged Christian children, single Christian mums whose husbands have left the faith and left them too. 'I was sick and you looked after me'. 'I was imprisoned for my faith and you looked after my family when I couldn't, you sent money from Australia to China, I've never met you, I don't know you, but you're my sister in Christ, my children are your children, and they love Jesus more than ever because of what you're doing

for them.'

If these words from Jesus have stirred your heart this morning, then consider today how you might practically live out your faith by supporting God's family in this world. Pray to him and ask him to bless your plans. And then do them.