

## Matthew 25B

- Time has come to end our study of the Olivet Discourse, and at the same time we also come to the end of the eschatology teaching in the Gospel of Matthew
  - After today, we enter the final section of Matthew's gospel to study Jesus' Last Supper, betrayal and passion
    - Before we get to that climactic section, we need to finish the parables of Matthew 25
    - And because we observed Jesus organized his teaching as a chiasm, we know where we're going today
  - We learned last week how the Olivet Discourse follows a chiastic outline, meaning Chapter 25 repeats the teaching of Chapter 24 in reverse
    - In Chapter 24, Jesus started teaching on the Second Coming and judgment for unbelievers
    - Then He moved to teaching about the Rapture and the judgment for believers' rewards
  - Now in Chapter 25 we're studying parables about the same topics but in a reverse order
    - So Jesus starts with parables about His return for the church and our rewards moment, which we studied last week
    - And today we finish the chapter with parables about the Second Coming of Christ and the judgment for those He finds on earth
- At first, you may think this final section won't be very relevant for us, since these events focus on others and not us personally
  - But that's not true, since there is more going on here than meets the eye
    - So let's study it and see what we find together
    - We begin where we left off in the final parable of the chapter

**[Matt. 25:31](#)** "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

**[Matt. 25:32](#)** "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;

- Jesus has returned to the topic of His Second Coming, and we know that both by the chiasm and by what we see in the details
  - First, Jesus says this return will be one of glory accompanied by angels for all the world to see
  - But we know the Rapture is not a coming of Jesus in glory or with angels for all to see, since it will be invisible to the world
  - Secondly, He says He judges all nations at this time, yet we know the Rapture only involves a judgment of believers
- So Jesus is describing the events of His Second Coming, which happens at the very end of this age following the seven-year Tribulation on earth
  - And at that time Jesus says He will sit on a glorious throne to judge the nations He finds waiting for Him on earth
  - Now it's important to understand this judgment is not the final, eternal judgment for unbelievers
- According to the book of Revelation, the final, eternal judgment for unbelievers happens after the 1,000-year Kingdom period
  - Here in Chapter 25 Jesus is describing a different judgment that takes place before the Kingdom period even starts
  - So we need to take a moment to understand what this particular judgment is all about
- First, let's go back to what Jesus told us about this moment in Chapter 24:

**[Matt. 24:30](#)** "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

**[Matt. 24:31](#)** "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

- At His Second Coming, Jesus said He would appear as a bright light in an otherwise pitch black sky coming with great power and glory
  - At that moment, all the tribes of the earth will mourn at the sight of Jesus returning

- They mourn because the unbelieving world took the mark of the beast during the Tribulation and worshiped him as messiah
- So now as they see the true Messiah returning to defeat the Antichrist, the world realizes this isn't going to go well for them
- Then Jesus says He will send His angels around the earth to gather the elect from wherever they are and bring them to Jesus at Jerusalem
  - The elect refers to the believers, primarily the Jews, who have come to faith during Tribulation and are still alive
  - They will be gathered to meet Jesus and to participate in the feast that inaugurates the opening of the Kingdom
- But now in v.32 we learn that not just the elect are gathered at that time, but *all* the nations are gathered, meaning unbelievers are also collected by the angels
  - Who are these unbelievers who are still alive at Jesus' return?
    - Well, we know these people are *not* those unbelievers who fought in the Antichrist's army in the battle of Armageddon
    - Revelation 19 and Zechariah 14 tell us that everyone engaged in that battle will be killed, including the Antichrist himself
  - So these nations of unbelievers are people who did not fight in the army but they were worshippers of the Antichrist
    - So Jesus must now decide what to do with them
    - And that's the purpose of this judgment...it's a judgment to determine who will enter the Kingdom and who will not
    - And to explain this judgment moment, Jesus moves into a parable in v.32 of sheep and goats
  - Jesus says this judgment will be like a shepherd sorting sheep from goats, which was a common shepherding task of the day
    - Goat and sheep could mix in the pasture during the day, but at night they were separated into separate pens
    - So a shepherd brought the herd in from the field and lined up his sheep to enter their pen and some goats would be mixed in
    - So at the door of the pen, the shepherd stood guard as sheep passed by, and the shepherd separated the goats out of the flock

- So Jesus is saying that is what He will do...He will determine who are sheep and who are goats and separate them one from another
  - So what does it mean to be a sheep or a goat in this parable?
  - To learn that, we need to read the rest of the parable

[Matt. 25:33](#) and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

[Matt. 25:34](#) "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.

[Matt. 25:35](#) '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;

[Matt. 25:36](#) naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

[Matt. 25:37](#) "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?

[Matt. 25:38](#) 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?

[Matt. 25:39](#) 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

[Matt. 25:40](#) "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.'

[Matt. 25:41](#) "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;

[Matt. 25:42](#) for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

[Matt. 25:43](#) 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.'

[Matt. 25:44](#) "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?'

[Matt. 25:45](#) "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.'

[Matt. 25:46](#) "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- To determine what a "sheep" or a "goat" is in this parable, we only need to look at the ultimate outcome of each group

- To cut to the chase, in v.34 we learn that sheep are those who will enter the Kingdom, while in v.46 we learn that goats are those who enter hell
  - So without a doubt, the sheep represent believers, for we know only believers will enter into the Kingdom in that day
  - And for the same reason, we know the goats are unbelievers, so only the unbeliever will be consigned to hell
- So the separating of sheep from goats is a judgment to determine who may enter the Kingdom on the first day and who will be put to death
  - Death is the only possible alternative to entering the Kingdom because the Kingdom will fill the entire earth, as Scripture says

**Psa. 22:27** All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,  
And all the families of the nations will worship before You.

**Psa. 22:28** For the kingdom is the LORD'S  
And He rules over the nations.

- So if the Kingdom fills the entire earth, and only believers are in the Kingdom, then there will be no place left for an unbeliever
- Therefore, the only option Jesus has for the unbelievers He finds waiting at His Second Coming is to put them to death
- At this point you may wonder why don't the unbelievers simply confess Christ at this moment rather than face certain death and an eternity in Hell?
  - Clearly, these "goats" will recognize that Jesus is the Lord, as He sits on His glorious throne with His angels preparing to judge them
    - And since they haven't died yet, we assume they still have time to make a confession of faith so why don't they do it?
    - Well, in fact, we know that these unbelievers *will* confess Christ, either now in that moment or at some later moment

**Phil. 2:10** so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

**Phil. 2:11** and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- So we know all humanity, including these unbelievers, will confess Christ sooner or later, but Paul *didn't* say all will have saving faith
  - In fact, it is literally impossible for these unbelievers standing before Jesus to have “faith” that Jesus is Lord
  - Any confession made at this point can't be based on faith, because Jesus can be plainly seen to be Lord and faith isn't sight
- Paul tells us this using the word “hope” as a synonym for faith

**Rom. 8:24** For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

**Rom. 8:25** But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

- Paul says we can't have faith in something we already see, because once something is self-evident, it no longer depends upon faith to believe
  - Therefore, once these goats see Jesus, they won't be able to show faith in Him, because sight nullifies faith
  - Anything they confess at that point is merely stating the obvious, and so they will be found without faith
  - And being without faith, they will be judged and put to death and will enter Hell like all unbelievers
- Now as this judgment moment plays out, both the sheep and the goats are left with questions about what's their respective fates
  - So Jesus begins in v.34 to explain to both groups why they receive the judgment they do, starting with the sheep on His right hand
    - Jesus tells the sheep that they are blessed by God to inherit the Kingdom of God
    - Jesus uses the word inheritance to describe the eternal riches awaiting these believers and all believers in the Kingdom
    - So let's understand why Jesus is calling the Kingdom our inheritance
  - An inheritance is something we receive because we are an heir to someone who has died

- For example, let's say you and your siblings are heirs of a great fortune to be handed down by your father when he dies
- His fortune will be split among all the children, including you, and of course you did nothing to become an heir
- You were made an heir by the actions of your parents who brought you into this world and made you part of a family
- So the opportunity to be an heir had nothing to do with your actions or choices but you do have a part to play in the inheritance
  - Because you can influence how much of your father's wealth will be assigned to you in his last will and testament
  - Presumably, if you please your father during your life, you may influence him to assign you a greater portion of the inheritance
  - If you fail to please your father, you may receive less, but regardless of your behavior, you are an heir by birth alone
- That is the analogy that the Bible uses to describe our rewards in the Kingdom...it is our inheritance
  - First, the Bible says we are fellow heirs with Christ

**[Rom. 8:15](#)** For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

**[Rom. 8:16](#)** The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

**[Rom. 8:17](#)** and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

- Notice the Bible says that by our faith we were adopted into the family of God
- We had to be adopted because we didn't come out of our mother's womb as believers in Christ
- All humanity are born as children of wrath, members of Satan's family because of our sin nature
- That's why we had to be born again by faith in Jesus, and adopted by God into a new family with Christ as our head
- But notice, Paul also says we are heirs with Christ, because Christ Himself is an heir of all things in Creation the Bible says:

[Heb. 1:2](#) in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- The Father appointed His Son, Jesus, to be an heir of everything in Creation, but if Christ is the heir, who died to leave Him an inheritance?
  - Notice the writer also tells us Jesus is the One Who made all things
  - So Christ is both the rich father who has the inheritance and Christ is the child who receives an inheritance
- How is that possible? First, Christ is the Creator, so everything in Creation belongs to Him
  - When He died on the cross, the Creation was His inheritance which became available to His heirs
  - Anyone who was included in Jesus' last will and testament – or we could say anyone in His covenant – is an heir to that wealth
- But then three days later Christ was raised from the dead, and being alive again, He receives back His own inheritance
  - It would be like your rich father coming back to life... he would likely demand you return your inheritance until he died again
  - But here's the difference... Jesus will never die again, so He willingly shares His inheritance with His fellow heirs forever
  - Our inheritance is a share of what Jesus Created, the world and all it contains, and we receive that eternal reward in the Kingdom
- That's what Jesus is telling these sheep in this moment of judgment
  - They are heirs because they were chosen by God before the foundations of the world to be adopted into the family of God
    - Just like the children of that rich father, these believers did nothing to make themselves members of the family of God
    - The Father brought them to faith and adopted them into His family by the kindness of His will, as Paul says

[Eph. 1:5](#) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

- And now that the Kingdom has arrived, these believers are being welcomed in to receive their inheritance
  - They are heirs with Christ, so they will inherit some portion of the Kingdom as their reward for serving Jesus in faith
  - James sums up everything we're learning in one verse

**James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?**

- Interestingly, these believers are all babes in Christ, relatively immature believers who have very little training or discipleship
  - We know they all came to faith during the seven year Tribulation, because they were not included in the Rapture of the Church
  - And during most of those seven years, it will be dangerous if not impossible to fellowship with believers or be discipled
- So these sheep will have had very limited opportunities during those short years to grow in their faith much less to serve Jesus
  - They will be like soldiers who received a battlefield promotion... they were thrown into the fight and expected to do their best
  - And what we're learning now is that their understanding is so limited that they weren't even aware they were serving Jesus
- So to help them understand what they did to please Him, Jesus begins to recount the good things these sheep did after coming to faith in Tribulation
  - In vs.35-36 Jesus lists six things they did for Him including giving Him food, water, shelter, clothing, medical treatment, visits in prison
    - Notice in v.37 Jesus calls these individuals "the righteous" confirming they are saved by faith
    - In response, the believers wonder in vs.37-38 when did they do these things for Jesus, since they never saw Him before now?
  - Jesus answers them by pointing to another group of people standing nearby and says you did those things for this group of my brothers

- Who is this other group of Jesus' brothers that received this service during Tribulation?
- He could be talking about any believers persecuted in Tribulation, but I believe Jesus is speaking more specifically
- Jesus' brothers likely refers to the Jews in Tribulation who ultimately come to faith at Jesus' Second Coming
- The book of Revelation tells us that the Jewish people will be the people most persecuted by the Antichrist during Tribulation
  - Satan, who indwells the Antichrist, will seek to exterminate the Jewish nation using unprecedented level of persecution
  - But the Lord intends to rescue His people from the enemy in the end and ultimately bring them to faith in Him
  - In the meantime, the Jewish people will endure great trial, so they will need the support and comfort of allies
- Now we're learning that Jesus will send them allies in the form of new believers who come to faith in Tribulation and serve the Jews out of compassion
  - They will feed, clothe, protect and otherwise assist the Jewish people (and perhaps Gentile believers as well) from Satan's attacks
    - And they will do so at great personal sacrifice, because anyone who aligns himself against the Antichrist will become a target
    - It will be like those who hid Jews from the Nazis during WWII... they risked their own lives to save the persecuted
    - It was a demonstration of faith, and Jesus views that service as if it was rendered directly to Him personally
  - Now these believers hear this explanation, and they are clearly surprised to learn that these actions were serving and pleasing Jesus
    - At the time, something inside them just told them it was the right thing to do
    - And even though they feared the consequences, that love and compassion compelled them to act
  - I'm also guessing they were not disciplined in their faith during the short years they spent living during Tribulation

- We can assume they had very little contact with a local church and more than likely they was no church at all
- They probably couldn't study the Bible or perhaps even access one, so they probably had no understanding of eternal rewards
- Nevertheless, just their faith alone was enough to cause them to serve others under such difficult circumstances
- And that selfless service became a testimony to their faith and an opportunity for eternal reward in the Kingdom
- I suspect many of you may be struggling a little with what you've learned about eternal reward
  - Perhaps you're now wondering if you've done enough to please Jesus or whether you will receive a good reward?
    - Perhaps you're saying, "Oh great here's another thing I have to worry about...something else on my To Do list I can't get done!"
    - Or you're stressing over the pressure to know your spiritual gift or pressure to volunteer more, etc.
  - If that's how you're thinking right now, then let the story of these sheep be an encouragement to you
    - Listen to what Jesus told these believers, and allow it to take the burden off your shoulders
    - He says they were serving Him even when they didn't know they were doing it...think about that for a moment
  - Remember what Jesus said about what it's like to serve Him

[Matt. 11:28](#) "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

[Matt. 11:29](#) "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

[Matt. 11:30](#) "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

- Jesus says serving Him will be like resting from heavy burdens, because serving Jesus is doing things your heart *wants* to do
- When we serve Jesus, we do so with spiritual abilities He gives us by His Spirit

- And He gives us opportunity to serve, and He brings the fruit from our service...*so what exactly do we do?*
- Simply put, we show up...because serving Jesus isn't about our ability, it's about our availability
  - Notice back in Matthew 11:29 Jesus said serving Him starts with learning from Him
  - He is gentle and humble in how He teaches us, so even the process of learning isn't hard or burdensome
- We just follow His lead, going where He sends us, doing what He asks with the power He gives us and achieving the results He determines
  - Friends, that is easy work...that is a light burden
  - It's like Jesus gave us a box that says "Some assembly required"
  - He gave something to build, but He provided all the materials, all the tools and a set of well-written, easy instructions
  - All He asked us to do is open the box...take a step forward...serve Him where you are
- That kind of work is actually a form of rest when you compare it to the work of serving the world, because serving the world is truly a burden
  - We are never satisfied in this world, and therefore the work is never easy, and the rewards are fleeting at best
    - So if you think serving Jesus is just another burden on top of serving in the world, then friends you aren't doing it right
    - The work of serving Christ is supposed to replace the heavy burdens of serving the world
    - You're supposed to say no to something so you can say yes to Jesus...let's go back to those sheep again
  - When they served Jesus by feeding or clothing a needy Jew, they were trading something in the world for the chance to serve in that way
    - Maybe they took food off their own table to feed those in need
    - Maybe they had to sacrifice their family's safety or maybe they had to give up space in their house to take in a refuge

- Those believers set worldly priorities aside to serve Christ because they felt compelled to love someone else more than themselves
  - They weren't Bible experts, they probably never set foot in a church
  - And they certainly didn't spend decades seeking out the perfect mission opportunity
  - They didn't even know they were serving Christ and yet they did and they were rewarded
- That's what serving Jesus looks like when you're working for a gentle and humble Master
  - You don't feel pressured, you don't resent the sacrifices, you don't even think of it as work
  - You'll feel you're finally doing what you were created to do, and the sacrifices are an honor, and the results come easy
- So if you're stressing over serving Christ or missing out on eternal rewards, let me make this easy for you
  - Just wake up every day, take a look at your to do list or calendar and ask yourself one question:
  - How do I make everything I'm planning to do today about serving Jesus? How will I show Christ's love to everyone I meet?
  - If you take that attitude into each day, the Lord will direct you into the moments where He wants you to serve
  - That's a light, easy burden and it's one that brings reward
- Before we end, we still need to cover Jesus' comments to the goats, because they too were confused by their circumstances
  - In v.41 Jesus turns to the "goats" on His left and says "Depart from me"
    - Remember, the Kingdom is on the whole earth, so when Jesus says depart, He means do not remain on earth
    - He also calls them accursed ones, meaning they are under the curse of eternal judgment
    - And they will go into the eternal fire which was originally prepared for the devil and the angels that follow him

- There's a popular myth that when a person dies today and goes to Hell that they are greeted by Satan, but Satan isn't in Hell and never will be
  - The Lake of Fire is Satan's future home, and unbelievers will one day join him there after the Kingdom
  - But today Satan roams free while unbelievers go to Hell, so they will not find a party with the devil...they simply find misery
- Now at this point the goats are thoroughly confused, because they can't tell the difference between themselves and the sheep
  - The two groups of people probably looked the same, both have suffered in similar ways over the past seven years
  - They see both groups are kneeling before Jesus now as He sits on His throne, so why are the sheep entering but not them?
- Earlier when the sheep asked for their explanation, Jesus didn't say anything about their faith
  - But of course, we know the sheep were saved by their faith because Jesus called them righteous
  - But Jesus never made that point to them...He just pointed to their good deeds done in faith
- Now Jesus makes a similar point to the goats saying their lack of service to Him was a reflection that they never knew Him and He never knew them
  - Remember that one slave from the parable of the talents who never served the Master...he just buried his one talent
    - He knew the master was a hard man, but he didn't know the master was also a man who was prepared to reward His servants
    - It was evidence that the servant never really had a relationship with his master and so he was put out of the master's house
  - Now we see that again here...these unbelievers lived through the same Tribulation as the believers, but they had no inclination to serve Jesus
    - They didn't feed or visit or care for those being persecuted because they were the ones supporting the persecution
    - They were living exactly according to the biblical principle that Paul gives us in Galatians

[Gal. 4:28](#) And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

[Gal. 4:29](#) But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

- It has always been true, since the days of Cain and Abel, that those of the flesh will persecute those of the Spirit
  - The unbelieving world will always and forever persecute the believing world, but when Jesus comes that persecution ends
  - These goats couldn't understand why they were condemned but that's understandable because they didn't know Jesus
- If you don't know you are a sinner, you don't have reason to need a Savior
  - If you don't realize you are going to be judged, then you don't look for a way to be forgiven
  - And if you don't realize what it means to have faith, then you won't understand when you are condemned for lacking it
- The only thing Jesus could do to explain the difference to these goats was to point to the way faith of the sheep led them to live differently
  - That's living for Christ...you know when you're pleasing Jesus when He can point to you as His example to explain faith to unbelievers
    - We have a word for that kind of life: it's called being a witness
    - A witness is someone who testifies to the truth, and that's the goal of serving Jesus...to be a witness to the world
  - It's not about achievements or being busy 24 hours a day...it's about a witness that leads people to know and follow Jesus
    - I hope you learned a lot about eternal rewards and the nature of the last days through the course of these two chapters
    - But more than anything, I hope you've gained a new perspective on serving Jesus
    - I hope you want to please Him by serving Him better and more consistently
    - Don't waste another minute...use every one because they are running out and He could appear at any moment