

As we saw last week with Jesus's parable of the talents, if we don't use what we have been given to build the kingdom, we will lose it. What we do for the earthly kingdom now, will determine our rewards in the heavenly kingdom later. Each of us will be judged upon what we did with the gifts and graces we were given to further the kingdom.

That truth fits in beautifully with the Scripture passage we just heard. Jesus told those listening at His feet that day that He would be leaving His earthly kingdom for a time and entrust it to His followers. He will then return in glory with the angels at the appointed time to judge the nations by separating the sheep from the goats. The sheep, these on His right, the ones who follow the shepherd and know His voice, will be separated from the goats, those on the left who don't know Him. Our modern ears, unfamiliar with shepherds and shepherding can easily miss the point Jesus was making. I am not an animal expert, but Dr. Anna O'Brien of Pet MD, is. She says one big difference between goats and sheep is their flock behavior. Goats tend to be much more independent than sheep, who adhere tightly to flock mentality. They often appear distant or aloof to us humans. In other words, sheep stick together and follow the shepherd, while goats tend to go off on their own. The point is that who know Jesus as their shepherd, these who trust Him to lead them where he wants to take them, are choosing to be separated from those who don't.

One of the many things the postmodern generation finds objectionable to Biblical Christianity is the revelation that God is both a God of love and mercy and a God of judgment and justice. In their minds, it is unconscionable that a God who pours out His love upon us and requires and expects us to love one another is also a God of anger and wrath that will judge and mete out divine punishment. As attractive as that belief may be, we also must acknowledge that the Bible reveals that Jesus had good reason to say a great deal about both. Without love evil would overcome the world and without justice corruption and inequity would overcome the world. **Jesus is not only our king, but He is our judge. Love and justice demand it.**

As the old saying goes, judgment day is coming, and it is coming for these who choose to love Jesus as well as for those who don't. Though it may be tempting to see goats simply as those who refuse to love Jesus, it may also include those who try to become sheep by feeding the hungry, clothing the homeless and welcoming the stranger. Those are worthy and necessary but if the motivation for doing them is to show others how good we are or to be rewarded in the kingdom, someday we may find ourselves empty handed.

If we believe that our place in the heavenly kingdom hinges upon our good deeds, our motivation for doing them will be to serve ourselves. Our labor will be out of expectation rather than out of love. In essence, we will be saying king me, instead of King Jesus and that is not a good place to be. On the other hand, if our motivation is to love Jesus more each day, it will be evident as our love for others will also be more evident each day. **Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats based upon our love for Him,** not our works or good deeds. The sheep will be rewarded in heaven for their faithfulness, while the goats will not. The good news is that the choice to be a sheep or a goat is ours. We can choose to love Jesus and love others or choose to love ourselves. As C.S Lewis once said, hell is the greatest monument to human freedom. I pray we will choose wisely and be richly rewarded as we worship and glorify our only King-Jesus. Amen