

A Kingly Calling  
Matthew 25:31-46

Well, I suppose it was bound to get out sooner or later so I need to tell you something that none of you know about me, not even Robyn.

I spent two years in juvenile lock-up and some time in jail. I hope I learned from those experiences. Now, I can just hear the wheels of your noodle grinding away as you try to figure out what I did. Before I explain let me tell you something that Pam shared with me a couple months ago when she sat in my office helping me understand a bit more about the Forgotten Man Ministries.

*“We are all one decision away from going to jail.”*

Before you say that won't happen to me, let that sink in for a moment. It doesn't take much. I'm sure Allan and Pam can share many stories about that one decision that landed someone in prison or that one decision that led to a series of additional bad decisions that ended in prison. That split second decision might even be unintentional.

Before you go crazy trying to figure out what I did that resulted in spending time in juvenile lock-up and prison I better explain. That way the Board won't have to hold a special after church meeting.

Let me begin by saying that I never did anything for which I was convicted that required time in the juvy detention or prison. When I attended Grand Rapids Baptist College all students were required to engage in some kind of Christian service each semester. For two years I worked with the juvenile ministry. There were a number of half-way houses around Grand Rapids where troubled teens lived in a home with some adults and counselors. We would go in to a home once a week to meet with the boys and hang out with them talking about life stuff. One of the college students would then have a devotional. We did the same thing in the juvenile detention lock-up facility and then once a month we would go on Saturday to play basketball and other games with them. The youngest that I remember being in lock-

up was 6 or 7. He did some stuff to get him sent to lock-up because he wanted to be with his older brother who was 12.

It was a tough place to serve, seeing kids that made wrong choices end up in jail. We did what we could to go in and be a friend and share Christ.

My time in jail happened one morning when I got a call from the mother of one of the teens in my youth group. Her husband was out of town on business so she called me. Her son, who was 17, was caught shop lifting – just for fun. He was locked up in the county jail. She wondered if I would go with her to the jail to pick him up.

Any one of us can be one decision away from prison.

Stealing that item just to see if we can get away with it

Running that red light but slamming into another vehicle or hitting a pedestrian who stepped off the curb to cross the street.

My Dad was bailiff for a court case that took several years to solve but ended in two brothers going to prison for life all because they got into a bar room fight that spilled over into a vacant field where they murdered someone

In some countries doing the right thing can land a person in prison – smuggling Bibles or sharing the gospel or just being a Christian when it's against the law of the land.

Statistics vary and Allan could probably provide more up to date information but in 2010 the FBI crime watches estimates that:

### **2010 CRIME CLOCK STATISTICS**

<b>A Violent Crime occurred every</b>	<b>25.3 seconds</b>
One Murder every	35.6 minutes
One Forcible Rape every	6.2 minutes
One Robbery every	1.4 minutes
One Aggravated Assault every	40.5 seconds

<b>A Property Crime occurred every</b>	<b>3.5 seconds</b>
One Burglary every	14.6 seconds
One Larceny-theft every	5.1 seconds
One Motor Vehicle Theft every	42.8 seconds

We might tend to look at statistics and say that people who end up in prison deserve what they got for the crime they committed. We might even think they deserve more than they got.

We watch the news and hear about trials and convictions and we think justice was served. The bad guy had it coming.

My youngest brother was dispatcher for the Sheriff's Department. He left one church because he had a hard time attending seeing people in his church who he saw earlier that week or last month who had spent a night in lock-up for something.

Let me share with you something that Bekka Neigh posted on her Facebook page last week that I hope will reshape our thinking, something that maybe puts it all in a different perspective.

“As I was driving home with my windows down I slowly passed a car. For some reason I thought that the passenger had spit on my car. I thought about how I would share it on Facebook and then of all the responses I might get.

My next thought was "an image-bearer spit on my car." That person was created in the image of God. That person is loved by God! Can I just tell you how that changed my attitude! So the next time someone pulls out in traffic, the next time someone doesn't use the common sense you think they should, the next time someone walks into your church that you don't think belongs...remember they are loved by God and created in His image.

I don't think anyone spit on my car, it just sounded like it.”

Let me add something to what she said. Everyone, regardless of what they have done, even those who ends up in prison, is loved by God.

Do they deserve the sentence they got? Probably

Do they deserve more? Maybe

But they are loved by God the same as you and me.

Let's not look on or think about the men and women who are in the Livingston County jail with disdain or contempt, that somehow they are the dregs of society who should be locked up and fed bread and water. They are loved by God and there

are folks who volunteer to serve God by going to share the Gospel with these inmates who need to know God's love just as much as you and me. God doesn't want them to perish just as much as those who are on the outside of prison walls and bars.

So that brings me to our passage this morning in Matthew 25:31-46.

Let me say as we dive into this passage that this is part of Jesus' discussion on end times. In chapter 24 Jesus tells the disciples that no one but the Father knows the day or hour when He will return. He gave some signs of what to look for in the end times. In chapter 25 He illustrates the need for being prepared and alert for His return through the story of the 10 virgins waiting for the Groom. He follows it up with the parable of the talents ending the chapter with the sheep and goats. This is all about end times stuff and whether you are a pre or post millennialist judgment is coming.

The premillennialist sees this passage happening at the end of the tribulation setting up for the 1000 year reign of Christ and see this as a separate event from the final Great White throne judgment.

The postmillennialist sees this passage happening after the 1000 year reign and see it as the Great White throne judgement.

There are reasons I believe this is right after the tribulation but this message is not about end times. It is looking at the application for us now.

The King who presides

The King who pardons

The King who punishes

The King who is pleased

## I. THE KING WHO PRESIDES – vs. 31-33

A High school friend of mine reposted the following message on his Facebook page:

“Tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, the largest fire in history, rumors of war and the largest hurricane on record in the Atlantic Ocean happening now...and people are fighting to take God out of everything? Seems to me God is sending an awfully loud message!!!! If you agree, share, put God back where He belongs.

A mutual High school friend responded: “What a great religion. God sends storms and fires to indiscriminately kill people and animals when some people don't pray hard enough or publicly enough?”

Let me set the scene in our passage for you. Here's what I believe and how I understand the events that are taking place, and yes, I am a premillennialist believing that this is taking place before Christ's earthly kingdom.

The horrible events of the Great Tribulation have just occurred. Catastrophic events of untold magnitude have just happened globally. The nations led by the antichrist have all defiantly thumbed their collective noses at God rejecting Him and His salvation. Christ has returned as He promised and some scholars believe He is standing on the Mt. of Olives just outside the city of Jerusalem when this scene occurs.

It says that the nations have all gathered together around the Son of Man. "Nations" comes from the Greek word *ethnos* or ethnic groups and refers to the Gentiles.

As we read through this passage we tend to want to see only two groups of people when in fact there are three groups. All the nations are around Christ and the first group noted is sheep. They are divided out from among the second group which are the goats. The sheep are escorted to the right hand of Jesus and the goats are escorted to His left hand.

It's a vivid analogy for Jesus's disciples because in that region of the world it's not uncommon to see sheep and goats herded together. But when it's time to feed them, they must be separated because the sheep which are naturally docile and gentle creatures will be overrun by the goats which are more aggressive and unruly.

The third group that is often overlooked are referred to as "brothers" in verse 40. Now to whom could Jesus be referring? There are three possibilities.

1. Those who are born again, Christians.
2. Those who are the physical brothers of Jesus.
3. Those who are Jewish by ancestry.

Let's keep in mind one important thing about the Tribulation. There will be relentless persecution against Christians and especially against the Jewish nation as the nations conspire to destroy Israel, but in spite of the persecution there will be people saved during the Tribulation. I believe that the souls of those under the altar who had been martyred for their faith are Christians killed during

the Great Tribulation. Revelation 7 speaks of 144,000 Jewish witnesses who will be saved. So there will be those who are saved during this time.

"Brothers" could be referring to Christians, but I don't think so.

"Brothers" cannot be talking about the physical brothers that were born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus was born.

That leaves "brothers" to be speaking about those who have a shared ancestry as Jews who are the target of the greatest antisemitism in history.

The Great Tribulation will result in a mass of people dying but many will live through it and these are the people gathered around Jesus.

Notice first the King's glory.

#### A. The King's Glory

Philippians 2 tells us about the kenosis of Jesus when He humbled Himself becoming a man veiling His glory for a time while He was here on earth. That glory was briefly seen by Peter, James and John on the mountain but was otherwise kept from view. For a moment they saw Him in His full radiance as He would normally appear.

John gives a brief description in his vision on the Isle of Patmos. Revelation 1:13-16 He saw "someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Those gathered around Him will see the King in all His glory, all His splendor. It will no longer be hidden. He will be seen for who He truly is.

Second, we notice the King's governance.

#### B. The King's Governance

Again, we go back to verses 31-33.

The first thing I see about His governance is His authority or His jurisdiction.

### 1. The King's jurisdiction – v. 31

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory.”

Jesus has the right to the throne, He has the right to rule, He has the right to reign. He has always had that right even before it was promised to David that his descendant would rule forever, even before it was promised to Judah that a king would come through his lineage. Philippians 2 says that He has been given a name that is above every name and at His name every knee will bow and tongue confess that He is Jesus Christ the Lord (2:9-11) and it was God who exalted Him to this position and gave Him that name of honor to which homage is due.

Hebrews 1:8 “But about the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of Your kingdom.’”

That He is sitting not only speaks of the place of His authority but the position of His authority. As King He has the right of jurisdiction to rule over the nations and He has the right to bring judgment on the nations.

### 2. The King's judgment – vs. 32-33

Not one nation will be outside His jurisdiction or His judgment. Not one will be excused. They will all stand before Him as He renders His verdict. The sheep and goats will be separated, the sheep stand to His right and the goats stand to His left.

Some scholars suggest that the location of this event is important. They believe that to the right of Jesus was the city of Jerusalem, the place where He will reside for His earthly rule. They also suggest that to His left will be the Valley of Hinnom. It was in this valley that King Solomon set up idol worship, a practice that some of the other kings of Judah followed. During the reforms of King Josiah he turned it into the city dump with a perpetual fire. In the New Testament it was known as Gehenna and became synonymous with the unquenchable and eternal fires of hell.

If what these scholars say is true then the symbolism is glaring, especially to those who stand on the left. To one side was life, to the other side was death.

The King has rendered His judgment and the sheep and goats are separated. He alone has the authority.

The third thing I see about the King who presides is His gathering.

### C. The King's Gathering

We have already talked about the host of earth that are gathered, all the nations and remaining people at the end of the Great Tribulation. But there is one other group gathered with Jesus. It is the host of angels. Verse 31 says all the angels will be with Him. It appears that the entire gates of heaven are emptied as they accompany Jesus to earth for this time of judgment. I don't have anything to pin this on, but it's my belief that the angels who have been invisible will now become visible to the naked eye. They will be seen by all gathered around Christ.

The King who is seated in splendor presides over the judgment of the peoples of the nations. As He sits in authority to render His judgment on each person we see the King who pardons.

### II. THE KING WHO PARDONS – vs. 34-40

Normally when someone is given an award or reward of some kind, their achievements are noted first as to the reason they are worthy of this honor. It's not that way here. Jesus does it differently. The King first gives His commendation.

#### A. The King's Commendation – vs. 34-36

One author notes that rewards in the kingdom are given to those who serve without thought of reward. There is no hint of merit here because He gives out of grace, not out of debt or obligation. This commendation would be akin to the reward given to the two faithful servants in the parable of the talents. Jesus gives both a verbal and tangible affirmation.

“Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master.”

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

I don't know if there are any sweeter words to the human ear. To be approved by the King and welcomed into His kingdom will be welcome words to these who have endured the Tribulation. Without

the mark of the Beast they would not have been able to buy or sell. They would have had to live in obscurity fending for their very existence, hidden from the populace so as not to be ratted out. But that's not why they are rewarded here. There's only one criterion the Just judge has for entrance or denial into His kingdom: what did you do to the Jews, My brothers? The sheep sheltered Him. The King says they fed and clothed Him, gave Him something to drink when He was thirsty. They welcomed Him as a stranger, providing care for Him when He was sick and visited Him in prison.

This is not a works based salvation, but works as an evidence of their salvation. John MacArthur notes "The good deeds commended here are the fruit, not the root of salvation." They had a living faith.

In this we see the King's consideration.

#### B. The King's Consideration – vs. 37-40

There are two important truths about these believers who come out of the Great Tribulation. We see first the King commends their attitude.

##### 1. The King considers their attitude

When did we do that Lord? we don't remember feeding or clothing or caring or visiting You. The King responds that when they did it for His brothers they did it to Him.

Remember that the Jews will be particularly targeted for extermination in the Great Tribulation. Throughout history there have always been those who want to wipe Israel from the map. Antiochus Epiphanes tried it in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Hitler tried it. Iran and Iraq have publically indicated their intent to destroy Israel. During the last days the nations led by the antichrist will make it their goal. It will be difficult for Jews to survive, so these Christians, saved in the Tribulation will boldly offer refuge to fleeing Jews feeding, clothing, helping the sick and visiting them in prison. Jesus sees their selflessness and humility.

Peter writes that God exalts the humble.

Not only does He commend their attitude, the King also commends their actions.

##### 2. The King considers their actions

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me."

It wasn't only in their attitude but also in their actions that are commended, not just about how they did it, but in what they did. This is not to earn salvation but to demonstrate their salvation. Like any believer or all believers they are saved by grace through faith. They do it out of risk for their own lives because it was the right thing to do.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus condemned those who desired to do good deeds so they could be seen. Don't toot your own horn like the religious leaders. "Hey look at me I'm about to do a good deed." Instead He commended people who did things in secret so that not even the left hand knew what the right hand was doing or giving. He went on to say that when you do things in secret your Father who sees those things will openly reward you.

We have been created to do good works that have been prepared for us to do before the foundation of the world. God saw their hospitality and helping hand during these tumultuous times and He is now rewarding them. Actions like these were an evidence of their salvation. James says that our faith is revealed by our good works.

Their reward given to them by the King is entrance into His kingdom. He is the King who pardons. This passage shows us something else.

#### III. THE KING WHO PUNISHES – vs. 41-46

As the King did with the sheep giving them first His commendation before His consideration, so with the goats the King gives His condemnation before His criticism.

##### A. The King's Condemnation – v. 41-43, 46

If the first words to the sheep were the sweetest words to hear, the words to the goats will be the most bitter to hear. "Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

v. 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment."

Like the sheep His condemnation is around their attitude and actions.

1. The King condemns their attitude
2. The King condemns their actions

When it came to the hunger or thirst or need for clothing or medical care or visiting the imprisoned, they were calloused and uncaring doing nothing. They saw the needs but remained unmoved to help, turning a blind eye and a deaf ear. Like the two religious leaders in the story of the Good Samaritan they kept on going, not wanting to get involved. Their attitude was self-centered, their actions were self-serving. They thought only of themselves.

And just like the sheep, the goats didn't know what Jesus was talking about. They were clueless. When did we not do that Lord?

Jesus reveals that they had every opportunity but didn't lift a finger to help His brothers who were in need. They were condemned to spend eternity in the same place of punishment that has been reserved for Satan and his angels. That's a sobering thought. People who are without Christ will receive the same punishment as the devil and his angels. These goats receive the King's criticism.

#### B. The King's Criticism – vs. 44-46

Verse 45 says that what they didn't do for them, they didn't do for Christ.

Again, their eternal punishment is not merit based. Their lack of action is an evidence of their lack of faith. Now actions can be misleading, because someone can be very benevolent and active in helping others out, but let's keep in mind that eternal life is all about faith in Christ. Their rejection of Christ is evident in their rejection of others. There is no accusation of any gross sin, just a lack of serving and selflessness. It's not about what they did, it's about what they didn't do.

God commended and rewarded the faithfulness of the sheep while at the same time condemned and punished the failure of the goats.

I want to close with a final thought by making some application about the King who is pleased. Again, keep in mind that this passage is about end times events, yet we can take something from it today.

#### IV. THE KING WHO IS PLEASED

Over the past couple of years I have intentionally asked local ministries here to share with the church so we as a church and you as individuals can

prayerfully consider how to be involved. We have people around us who are hungry and thirsty and in need of clothing, who are strangers, who are sick and who are in prison. They may feel alone, abandoned or ostracized and we have the means to help them. Will we respond with sacrifice, service, and selflessness?

Several weeks ago when we looked at II Peter 2:5 I talked about the boat Noah built. My challenge then is the same today. The Lord told Noah to build something that was humanly impossible. It defied human capability. It would require a mountain size faith. My challenge then was to consider that God has asked each of us to build some boat. He has some kind of ark that requires tremendous faith.

*God isn't asking you what you can do, He's asking what will you do, what will you do in faith.*

Noah had to trust God to build an ark.

You will have to trust God to build your ark.

Maybe God is speaking to you to get involved in some way with the Forgotten Man Ministries. They need prayer warriors who will faithfully pray for the inmates – both Christians and non-Christians. They need prayer warriors who will faithfully pray for the chaplains who regularly minister to the inmates. They need people who can grade Bible studies. You may be called to go to jail. Let's be the sheep who please the King.

We all really are one decision away from going to jail, and that can be a good thing if we are going there to serve the King.