

Let us pray: Lord God, Heavenly Father, we come before You today to confess our sins. Far too often in this life we are cold and uncaring; too often we are mean-spirited and bitter... forgive us Lord. For the sake of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ who willingly gave everything for our salvation, please, be merciful to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the twenty-fifth chapter beginning at the thirty-first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² "All

the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³ "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as

you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' ⁴¹ *"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:'* ⁴² *'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;'* ⁴³ *'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'* ⁴⁴ *"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'* ⁴⁵ *"Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'* ⁴⁶ *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

As the end of His life approached, Jesus wanted to give His disciples a picture to understand what awaited them. We can envision Jesus giving this message to His disciples on the Mount of Olives after He had just delivered two other powerful messages: the parable of the Virgins, which we will hear about next week, and the parable of the Talents. And both of those parables describe the "Kingdom of Heaven" or as we call it the church. Then He goes into our lesson for today: the lesson of the sheep and the goats.

We picture a giant courtroom in which the judge has just arrived. As He takes His seat,

those who are guilty are lined up on His left and those who are innocent are lined up on His right. And those who are lined up know their past, they know they are sinners, they know that they have done lots of wickedness in their lives... and yet the Judge, Jesus Christ, finds some of them innocent. How can this be? Well, as Christ tells us elsewhere a tree is known by its fruit and ***“every good tree will bear good fruit,”*** thus a Christian is known by His works; and as you have done to the least of Christ’s brothers, Jesus tells us, ***“You did it to Me.”***

“But hold on Pastor,” you may be saying, “I don’t get to heaven based upon my works, I get there through faith in Jesus’ life and death;” and you are right. You will not get into heaven because of your works. Jesus never says that in this text, but He does say that those who are going to heaven are doing works. As Gerhard reminds us, ***“A true Christian should be diligent in this with a***

humble heart, not seeking honor, fame, or reward. We see here that the elect themselves do not consider their works to be worthy of the superabundant reward they will receive.”

And with this in mind, we look to the very words of Christ, ***“Then the righteous will answer...”*** Did you catch that? “The righteous.” Those who are righteous before God will be doing these works. Those who have been chosen by God before the beginning of the world, those elect of God will be doing good works. But we are not very good at this, are we?

As the elect of God, how often do we neglect those in need? How often do we ignore the cries of Christians around the world? How often do we play down others needs because our wants still exist? How often do we not do the works that God has prepared for us because we have our own idea of good

works and deeds that need to be done?

Do you spend more time filling out your retirement account or helping those less fortunate? Do you spend more time picking out a new house or serving a struggling brother or sister in the faith? Do you spend more time relaxing and enjoying life or defending your brothers and sisters?

And now look at the text again. God does not ask us if our life was nice and easy; God does not ask us if we felt we had enough; God does not even ask how large our bank account was... He wants to know where your heart was. Was it with those who needed a simple drink? a simple meal? some clothes? And how many of these things do we have an abundance of?

The righteous will be doing these things... and sometimes we fail miserably at this. And when we fail to help others, we fail to help

Christ. When we focus more on ourselves than other Christians, we focus less on Christ. When we care more about our wants, we care less about Christ. When we help ourselves to the detriment of others... what are we doing to Christ?

You see, the righteous are making sure they have what they need, but they are also doing what they can for others. And as the End Times continue, Jesus wants us to be ever mindful of this. We, the elect, the chosen of God, the righteous should be doing the works of God... but they will not earn us heaven.

For when we attempt to do works to gain heaven, we gain nothing. We may gain popularity and honor in the eyes of the world, but is that what gets us into heaven? We may gain wealth and fame, but does that get us into heaven? We may gain so many

things by our works but never will we gain heaven by our works...

Rather, when we are righteous we will do works. When we are righteous... and that righteousness only comes from one place: God. The righteousness that we have comes from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and all that He has done for us. It was Christ who came from heaven to earth to live the perfect life. It was Christ who came to this earth to die the innocent death in my place. It was Christ who bore all of my punishment and guilt for my sins on the cross. It was Christ who rose from the dead for me. It was Christ who claimed me as His own and has clothed me in His righteousness, His perfect righteousness.

It is only because of our Savior Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again that we are righteous. And Christ gives us that righteousness in our baptism and in our

conversion. For when we are baptized, we are clothed in His righteousness and we become His child through the faith He gives to us.

Jesus also gives us this righteousness through His word, so that as we read and hear that word faith is implanted in our hearts and that faith is strengthened. And through His very body and blood, which we receive for the forgiveness of our sins, we receive the pardon that only He can offer and the assurance that our sins are forgiven, and we are indeed righteous.

And now that we are righteous, now that we wear the white robe of righteousness that only Christ can give us, well now we do those works that Christ has laid before us to do. It is not great and grand works, but it is the simple things: giving water to those who are thirsty, giving food to those who are hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick

and imprisoned. When we do those simple things, and so many others, we are doing the works of Christ and those things that He would have us do.

And as the End of Time continually draws nearer, we can continue to do these works. We do them, not to earn heaven, but to show for the love of Christ, the love that He lavished upon us, the love that assures us of our salvation.

And this love is shown to us in His life and death. This love is shown to us in the crucifixion He suffered for us. This love is shown to us in that, while we were still sinners Christ died for us... and while we were still sinners God chose us, from all eternity, and made a place for us in His heavenly home.

Dear friends in Christ, on that last day, as the courtroom begins to fill, know that through

faith you will be on the right hand side. You will not be there because of the great works that you do; rather, you will be on that side because you are righteous, chosen by God from all eternity, to be on that side and because you are on that right side you do those works God would have you do.

Thanks be to God that He has chosen me to be on His right side. Thanks be to God that He has given my my righteousness through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. And thanks be to God that through faith in Jesus I can now do those works not only for the 'least' of His brethren, but more importantly, I can do them for Him.

Dear friends, thanks be to God. Amen.