

# Community Group Discussion Guide

## February 18, 2024

### Matthew 25:31-46 | The Sheep and the Goats

#### MOTIVATE

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Starter Question:

- ⇒ *Currently, what is something in your future for which you are carefully planning? Why is advance preparation needed?*
- ⇒ *Apply this quote to your preparations: The more critical the mission, the more careful the planning.*
- ⇒ *How does this quote apply to our preparation for Jesus' return?*

Optional Activity: Discuss what Oklahomans typically keep in their tornado safe rooms or designated tornado spots. Bring along some of your emergency supplies and display them in your Community Group area.

- ⇒ *Why do we prepare like this?*
- ⇒ *As believers, why do we need to prepare for Jesus' return?*

#### DISCUSS

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Beginning with His Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21, Jesus knew He was nearing the last days of His earthly life and ministry. At the beginning of His Passion Week, in Matthew 21-23, conflict predominates. Jesus cleansed the temple, had His authority challenged by the Jewish religious leaders, lamented over Jerusalem, confronted the religious leaders, and began to speak of end time events with His disciples through both parables and teachings. (See [Matthew Overview](#) for additional information on the Gospel of Matthew.)

- ⇒ *Why are these events an important part of Jesus' Passion Week?*

In Matthew 24:1-2, Jesus left the temple area after making a prophecy about its future destruction--which happened at the hands of the Romans in 70AD. Jesus then went with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. In Matthew 24:3, they came to Him privately, asking, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

In Matthew 24:3-51, Jesus spoke in greater detail about signs of the end of the age, the persecution His followers should expect, rumors that would accompany His Second Coming, the tribulation, and the timing of these events. He used an object lesson about fig trees and told several parables, both of which emphasized His disciples' need for preparedness for His eventual return.

- ⇒ *When we study Jesus' teaching on end times, do we tend to focus more on preparedness or on trying to figure out dates and the order of events?*
- ⇒ *What does this reveal about us as human beings?*

Matthew 25:31-46 contains the last of Jesus' parables in Matthew's narrative. This passage is part of the series that began in Matthew 24:42. This particular parable is typically called "The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats" and it has a prophetic theme about end times when all nations are before the judgment seat of God. Jesus wanted to prepare His people to be ready for the day when this future judgement came.

⇒ ***Why is it important to set the context for Matthew 25:31-46?***

Jesus' disciples were focused on the end result of His return. In this, they lost sight of the task to be completed before His Second Coming. Jesus used this parable to challenge His followers to live well in the present, not to study future details.

⇒ ***Discuss this quote: Jesus taught about the future to motivate us to obedient and holy living in the present.***

⇒ ***Why did Jesus downplay the future in favor of a focus on the present?***

***Matthew 25:31-33*** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

⇒ ***Why is it important for us to note that all nations will be involved in this judgement?***

The parable describes Jesus as the heavenly Son of Man, seated on the throne in absolute authority, surrounded by angels. As the people of all the nations stand before Him, Jesus will make a separation. He will act like a shepherd, separating the sheep from the goats.

- Sheep: Prominent animals in the sacrificial system of Israel. A valuable source of food and clothing, sheep are used consistently in Scripture as an image of God's people.
- Goats: Extremely destructive to vegetation. They cause erosion as they tear plants out of the soil. From a distance, sheep and goats often looked similar in appearance. But it was necessary for shepherds to separate the herds because male goats could be hostile toward the sheep.

Sheep and goats often grazed in the same pasture and freely mingled. They were then herded together down a chute that was wide enough for only one animal at a time. A shepherd would sit atop the fence, swinging a gate back and forth to guide each animal through the appropriate opening to join its kind. The point of Jesus' prophetic parable is that He will put the sheep at His right hand, the place of favor, and the goats will be at His left.

⇒ ***Why must there be a separation?***

⇒ ***On what will the separation be based?***

Jesus wants His followers to envision people being separated from one another as when a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The right side was considered the side of honor and authority. These represent Jesus' faithful disciples of all the ages. On the left, the position of lesser honor, were the goats, identified as the faithless. From this point on to the end of the

passage, there is no more mention of sheep and goats. The two categories become God's righteous people on Jesus' right and the unrighteous on His left.

**Matthew 25:34-40** *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by 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 welcomed me, 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 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*

Jesus will invite those on His right to share in the full blessing and inheritance of His Father's Kingdom because of their ministry to Him on earth. He will declare that when He was in need, these were the ones who acted in compassion to meet His need. While not an exhaustive list, Jesus listed six conditions representative of needs people might have that were met: hunger, thirst, alienation, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment.

The righteous will be surprised and will ask when they had ever done these things for Jesus. He will tell them that in performing these acts of kindness for those in need, they had performed them for Him. They served with a right heart—in particular for the least significant of Jesus' followers (verse 40).

- ⇒ ***Discuss this truth: We are faithfully doing the work of God's Kingdom if we care for the needs of those around us.***
- ⇒ ***How can this become one of the focuses of our Community Group?***

Please note: One of the purposes of Henderson Hills Community Groups is "Serving the Lord Together." If you haven't done so yet, enlisting a Mission/Discipleship Coordinator will ensure your Community Group is focused on this vital, biblical purpose. For more information, contact Phil Sallee, Henderson Hill's Pastor of Discipleship and Community at [psallee@hhbc.com](mailto:psallee@hhbc.com). You can also find a link with information at <https://www.csmedia1.com/hhbc.com/cg-certification-week-6-mission-coordinator.pdf> or a video at <https://vimeo.com/868941936>.

Jesus was not advocating salvation by works but rather the truth that faith in Him is the basis for these acts of mercy. Works are evidence of saving faith, not the means to salvation. The surprise of the righteous indicates that their actions were evidence of a received salvation and the transformation of the Spirit. Their works confirm they belong to Jesus.

- ⇒ ***What blessings do the righteous stand to inherit?***
- ⇒ ***On what basis is this given?***

**Matthew 25:41-46** "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal 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 welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' **44** Then they also will answer, 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, 'Truly, I say to you, 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 eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The righteous have a bestowal of eternal life in contrast to those on the left. The unrighteous will receive a different verdict, although the criterion for judgement is the same. They will go away in a permanent departure into eternal punishment because they did not care for Jesus when He was suffering.

These, too, will question Jesus as to when they had failed to minister to Him. Jesus will tell them that He was present in the suffering people they encountered. By not ministering to them, they had failed to minister to Him. The neglect of needy brothers, even the least, was the same as neglecting Him.

⇒ ***Discuss the main point of Jesus' parable: God will one day judge the entire world based on their response to the gospel. Proper responses lead to eternal reward; improper responses lead to eternal punishment.***

We will be accountable for what we do in this life while we wait for Jesus' return. All of us will stand before Jesus' judgement seat to answer for our treatment of others, especially fellow believers. Jesus challenges us to minister to the needs of others as if we are ministering to Jesus Himself. We serve because we have been served, we love because we have been loved. This is the work of the Kingdom of God.

⇒ ***Discuss this quote from the Holman Commentary on Matthew: Do not become obsessed with the future but invest yourself in the present in order to be prepared when the future arrives and you stand before the King.***

⇒ ***Why does this require both immediate and long-term readiness?***

## **TRANSFORM**

**1. Make personal application:** Jesus commands His followers to be ever ready for His return by remaining faithful and obedient to His Word today. "It is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future. It is to intensify our purity in the present." (Holman New Testament Commentary, Matthew, page 390) Jesus was very clear about promises of reward and warnings of judgement that will accompany His coming.

⇒ ***What is your motivation to live faithfully today?***

⇒ ***Are you prepared for your mission in the present?***

⇒ ***Are you prepared for the future judgement?***

⇒ ***How can you be ready at all times for Christ's return and His reward?***

**2. Pray:** Praise God that He has a plan for your eternity. Thank Jesus for making your future reward possible. Ask God to help you be mindful of present day opportunities to serve Him by serving others.

## **STUDY**

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### **Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:**

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, Matthew, pages 388-391, 414-430.*
- *The NIV Application Commentary, Matthew, pages 796-822.*
- *Shepherd's Notes, Matthew, pages 76-98.*