

Matthew 25:31–46 | “Judgment Day”
Preached on July 7, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 25, and we will be in verses 31 to 46 today. *[pauseeee]*

What are your thoughts about judgment day? *[pause]*

Just that one little, short phrase (“judgment day”) can make a lot of thoughts and emotions rush into our minds. *[pauseeee]*

For some, instant fear, nerves, or dread fills them.

For others, they may feel nothing, for they only feel apathy or indifference to the idea. *[pauseeee]*

That second response (indifference) is common in our day, for as R.C. Sproul once said, “Modern man is betting his eternal destiny that there is no final judgment.”¹ *[pauseeee]*

This apathy or unbelief in a judgment day is revealed in recent polling, too...

According to the 2022 State of Theology survey, only 45% of American adults strongly agreed that there would be a time when Jesus Christ returns to judge all the people who have lived.² *[pauseeee]*

Now you may say, “Well yeah, that would make sense, for, of course, most unbelievers aren’t going to believe that Jesus would return to judge.”

And I would agree, but just listen to the stats of professing Christians. *[pause]*

Of American Evangelicals, so this is us (those who believe in the good news of Jesus and the authority of the Scriptures), 73% of American Evangelicals strongly agreed that Jesus would return and judge all people. *[pause]*

That’s sad!

Only 73% of evangelicals strongly agreed with that!?

This is us who believe in the authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures! *[pause]*

And then when you look at Mainline denominations, it gets way worse, as an astonishing mere 48% of Mainline denominational Christians strongly agreed that Jesus will come back and judge. *[pauseeee]*

¹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/final-judgment-and-christian-life>.

² This stat and the next couple stats come from:

<https://thestateoftheology.com/data-explorer/2022/21?AGE=30&MF=14®ION=30&DENSITY=62&EDUCATION=62&INCOME=254&MARITAL=126ÐNICITY=62&RELTRAD=62&EVB=6&ATTENDANCE=254>.

Obviously, this is a topic that many don't believe in, and the reason is because they don't *want* to believe in it.

For it's very clearly in the Word of God, as is proved here in our passage, which talks about Jesus and His judgment. *[pauseeee]*

In context, Jesus has been talking about His second coming, but also, how we are to be ready for it.

And now He finishes out His teaching on the end times by describing what will happen at the final judgment. *[pause]*

Look down at the passage, as I READ it. *[READ]*

I would like to show you two important things found in this passage, and the first one is...

I. The identity of Christ.

Some see Jesus as just a wonder-worker, who did amazing miracles, and that's it.

Others see Him as just a good ethical teacher or good example, and that's the extent of it. *[pause]*

For some people, they know that He was probably the most influential person to have ever lived, but leave it at that.

And others say that He was just a mere prophet. *[pauseeee]*

As we have been working through the Gospel of Matthew, we have seen who Jesus is, and now this text shows us further who He is.

And He is way more than a mere man alone, or a nice ethical teacher, for He is the returning King! *[pauseeee]*

I find that we don't always act like this is true.

And what's revealing is that many Christians today *say* that Christ is King, but *live* like He's not.

And this is seen most clearly when it comes to some of His teachings that are harder to accept in our time. *[pauseeee]*

How do many people in our day react to the truth that the Bible says that He is coming to judge, as is seen in our passage? *[pause]*

Well apparently a big portion of them don't even believe it! *[pauseeee]*

How do many people in our day respond when they hear Him talk about separating people into only two groups, one of which is sent to eternal fire? *[pauseeee]*

They conveniently like to leave those teachings out when talking about Jesus.

Or they act like Jesus would just be *so opposed* to a belief in Hell, yet He's the very One who is speaking in our text today about eternal fire! *[pauseeee]*

We must live like He is King, and declare that He is King, for He is returning King, set to come back! *[pauseeee]*

In verse 31 it says, "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory.*" *[pauseeee]*

There will be a day "when" He comes back, do you believe that? *[pause]*

It's a sure fact, it's just a matter of when, and He is coming again in his glory. [pause]

The whole world will see and witness His splendor and majesty.

They will see His glory in all of its magnificence, and He's coming with all the angels! *[pause]*

Here they accompany Him as a mighty host as He comes in glory, which only reveals just how glorious He really is. *[pause]*

And that's not all!

He will come in glory, come with all the angels, and even sit on His glorious throne. *[pauseeee]*

None other than the king sits on a throne, and His is a glorious throne. [pauseeeee]

Thrones are usually inherently glorious, right?

Well He is so amazing, high up, and exalted that Jesus can't help but describe His own throne by emphasizing that it's implied glory isn't enough to describe it, He must say it's a *glorious* throne. *[pauseeeeeee]*

What an amazing event that the Lord's return will be.

May we remember that this is the Christ that we serve: the One who *will* come again in His glory, and *will* someday sit on His glorious throne. *[pauseeee]*

Not only do we see Jesus' identity as King here, but also as Judge. *[pauseeee]*

Throughout the Old Testament, God was seen as Judge. [pause]

Back in Genesis, Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"³ *[pause]*

In Daniel 7, "the Ancient of Days", who is God, takes his seat in judgment.⁴ *[pause]*

³ Genesis 18:25.

⁴ Daniel 7:9–10.

Well now we see this judgment language applied to Jesus.

And this demonstrates once again that Jesus *is* God, for only God has the right to judge.

[pauseeee]

So this Christ, the Judge, is going to judge “all the nations”, which points to every person.

[pause]

Every single nation, every single people group, every person is accountable to Him—no one is counted out. *[pause]*

He is truly “the King of kings and Lord of lords”.⁵

He is the ultimate Ruler over all, who every nation will have to stand before someday. *[pauseeee]*

So many times we are fearful of the nations of this world or the powerful people of this world, and think that they have so much power and control.

And you can start to think that all that there is is the nations here and the kings and lords that reign here, but that’s not true...

Those nations, those kings, lords, and all the people in the world are accountable and under the authority of the Lord Almighty, King Jesus.

And they all will stand before Him when He returns. *[pauseeee]*

Christ is supreme! Who can compare?

May we always remember that He is the supreme King, who reigns over all, and will show that reign in its fullness when He comes again. *[pauseeee]*

So we see the identity of Christ most definitely here in this passage, but we also see...

II. The judgment of Christ.

The judgment of Christ is not a popular truth in our day. *[pause]*

Bring it up and people squirm, sweat, or shift a little bit. *[pause]*

Others are just plain offended, or are flabbergasted that you would even dare to claim that Jesus will judge. *[pause]*

Some might even say, “But Jesus is all about love and forgiveness, so how could you say such a thing?”

⁵ Revelation 19:16.

And yeah, Jesus is about love and forgiveness, but He's also just and righteous, and cannot let sin slide.

Not to mention, the text right in front of us very clearly tells us that Jesus will judge. *[pauseeee]*

Since many people in our culture get upset if you bring up that Jesus will judge, it can tempt us to try to lighten it, lessen it, or leave it altogether. *[pause]*

Some people take the power out of this truth by killing it with a million caveat cuts.

But we must remember that Jesus said these things, so how could we (in any way) shy away from it or talk as if we are embarrassed about it. *[pause]*

How could we treat what He says here kind of like that crazy uncle that we have to claim, but we need to continually say, "Sorry about him. I know he's a little much." *[pauseeee]*

How dare we treat God's truth like that! *[pause]*

Of course, we don't go jumping around in joy saying, "Jesus will judge!"

But we also don't water it down or put it in the closet, either. *[pause]*

We speak as the Bible speaks of it, and it doesn't hold back, but clearly shows us that Jesus is the judge, and He *will* judge.

It's a serious thing and a 100% true thing, so let's act like it. *[pauseeee]*

We see in this passage that Jesus will separate people into two groups—sheep and goats. *[pause]*

Now this isn't literal sheep and goats, but it's using imagery of how a shepherd would separate them. *[pauseeee]*

And these two groups show us an important truth—there is no middle ground, nor third option.

There are only two groups, and one will experience eternal life, and the other experiences eternal punishment. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes people think that there's a third option.

They think, "Oh, of course, that godly lady over there will experience eternal life, and the Hitler's and the terrorist's of the world will go to eternal punishment..."

...But this guy over here, who doesn't believe in Jesus—he's still a really nice guy, so I'm sure Jesus will be understanding." *[pauseee]*

Others think that there's not just two paths, but millions of paths, and they all lead to eternal life.

But that's not what Scripture says! *[pause]*

I don't care what other people say, I don't care what the world will think about this, Christ says that there *will be* a great separation!

Not everyone will experience eternal life! *[pauseeee]*

If you notice in our passage, there are two groups—and there is a drastic difference in their outcomes. *[pause]*

The ones on the right are declared blessed and get to inherit the kingdom, while the ones on the left are declared cursed and have to go to eternal fire. *[pauseeee]*

We see here that it is Jesus who decides and declares this.

So we must remember that in the end, it won't matter the judgment of others or the judgment of the world.

Their judgment means nothing in the scope of eternity. *[pause]*

What will matter in the end is the judgment of Christ.

So do not worry yourself with what the world thinks, be concerned with what Christ thinks of you.

His judgment is what will determine your future, and His judgment is righteous and ultimate. *[pauseeee]*

He declares someone blessed or cursed.

He pronounces that someone will receive eternal life or eternal punishment.

And this is because He is the King and Judge, and so He has that right, that authority, that power.

And no one will be able to change His verdict, for it will be final—there is no appeal process or higher court to go to. *[pauseeee]*

Notice more aspects that are different in what Jesus says to the two groups. *[pause]*

For those on the left, He says, “Depart from me.” *[pause]*

What terrible words to hear spoken to you, for Christ to say, “Depart from me,” is the worst thing that one could hear. *[pause]*

To depart from Christ is to depart from any possibility of life and enter into eternal punishment.

It's to go away from the precious presence of Christ to the horrid presence of eternal fire. *[pauseeee]*

But if you think about it, those called to depart from Him are the ones who have chosen to depart from Him already.

They have rejected Him, so they are only really getting what they wanted and chose to do.
[pause]

If you reject Christ, you are rejecting life and choosing death because you are rejecting the Life-giver, the Blessing-declarer, and the Kingdom-provider. [pauseeee]

But consider what He says to the ones on the right...

He says, "Come." [pause]

What a blessing to hear *that* word! [pause]

To be invited to go to Christ is to be invited to experience eternal life and blessing forever and ever. [pauseeee]

They are also called those "blessed by [the] Father", and are referred to as "the righteous".
[pause]

These people have the favor of God, and are seen as righteous in His sight.

This is why they get to "inherit the kingdom." [pauseeee]

It's not because they merited the kingdom, but they simply get to "inherit" it because they are children of God. [pauseeee]

This whole situation is not something that God decided on a whim, or just felt like doing in the moment.

Instead, this kingdom was "*prepared* for [them] from the foundation of the world." [pause]

It has been in the plan of God to give a people the kingdom before He even created the world!
[pause]

The whole of human history and the whole of our salvation has been planned, orchestrated, and will be brought to completion by God.

So what confidence we can have even as we face persecution, trial, and hardship! [pause]

We can look to the day when we will inherit that kingdom, which has been prepared for us, which is Heaven and all of its glory. [pauseeee]

So far we have covered Jesus' identity, which is clear here.

We have covered that there's judgment to come, which involves two groups—a blessed group, which inherits the kingdom, and the cursed group, which experiences eternal punishment.

[pause]

But the question remains—why is it that these two groups are judged differently? *[pause]*

What is the basis? *[pause]*

Well we see it in the “surprise” of judgment day. *[pauseeee]*

When Jesus gives His reason for His decision, both groups are surprised at what He says.

[pause]

If you notice, both groups are held to the same criteria *[pause]*

He says to the one group, “I was hungry and you gave me food,” and then to the other group, “I was hungry and you gave me no food.”

And then goes on talking about being thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison. *[pauseeee]*

In response, both the ones on the left and the ones on the right pretty much say, “Wait a second, I don't remember ever doing those things (or not doing those things) to you.” *[pauseeee]*

They are thinking back upon their lives, and saying, “That doesn't make sense because it's not like I saw you in person hungry and gave you food.”

Or, “It's not like I saw you in person and didn't give you food, so what's with that?”

And Jesus makes an amazing statement in verse 40, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” *[pauseeeee]*

This is the surprise on judgment day—how you treated Jesus' disciples is how you treated Him. *[pause]*

This isn't just a general kindness to all, though we *should* have a general kindness to all.

Rather, this is care and love shown to Jesus' brothers, which refers to His disciples.

And this love and care should be shown even to the least of His disciples. *[pauseee]*

The ones who are extra needy, the ones who are especially looked down upon by the world—we should care for the needs of those people. *[pauseeee]*

You see, Jesus is teaching us that how you treat Christ's brothers and sisters reveals your relationship with Him. *[pause]*

You ignore them and their needs, showing them no love, and you show that you don't love Christ. *[pause]*

You take care of them and love them, you show that you love Christ. *[pauseeee]*

It's not that these good works saved them, but that Jesus can look at how you treated believers, and see what you truly think of Him.

And the surprise of the righteous showed that they didn't do these things in order to merit eternal life. *[pauseeee]*

As one commentator said, "The works we do are the evidence either of the grace of God at work in us or of our rejection of that grace."⁶ *[pausee]*

James makes this point by saying, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."⁷ *[pauseeee]*

John in 1 John 2:9 says, "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness." *[pauseeee]*

Our love for fellow believers reveals whether we are truly one of his disciples, and reveals whether we actually have faith. *[pauseeee]*

You see, loving one another should be a defining mark among us—there shouldn't be a needy Christian among us that is not taken care of. *[pause]*

Are they hungry? We feed them. Thirsty? Given a drink.

A Christian new to our church whose a stranger? Welcomed in.

Naked? We clothe them.

Sick or in prison? Cared for. *[pauseeee]*

By caring for the needs of needy believers, we are actually caring for Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that crazy to think about!? *[pause]*

When you take the time, sacrifice your money, go out of your way to care for a needy believer, you are actually caring for Jesus. *[pause]*

It's not that they are *literally* Jesus, but that Jesus so closely identifies with His people that how you treat them is how you are treating Him. *[pauseeee]*

I'm sure this isn't a perfect illustration, but think of it this way...

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 634.

⁷ James 2:15–17.

Imagine you are close friends with a guy named Jim, and Jim's son starts working at the same company as you. *[pause]*

What would you do for Jim's son? *[pause]*

You would treat him extra well because you would think, "That's Jim's son, I'm going to go out of my way to make him feel welcome." *[pause]*

You do this because of the strong link between Jim and his son.

Welcoming Jim's son is like welcoming Jim.

Treating Jim's son badly is like a slap in the face to Jim. *[pauseeee]*

So likewise, how we treat Jesus' brothers and sisters, which are His disciples, is how we treat Him. *[pauseeee]*

This is why Jesus can use this fruit to see the root.

Because how you respond to even the least of Christ's disciples demonstrates how you respond to Jesus and His message. *[pauseeee]*

This is exactly why on the road to Damascus, Jesus can confront Paul, who was persecuting Christians and say, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."⁸ *[pause]*

As Jesus said elsewhere, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours."⁹ *[pause]*

And finally, back in Matthew 10:40, Jesus said, "Whoever receives you receives me." *[pauseeee]*

So many times nowadays you will hear someone say, "I hate the church, but I love Jesus."

Well Jesus is showing us plainly that if you hate the church, you will be utterly shocked on judgment day to hear Jesus say, "Depart from me." *[pauseeee]*

How you treat His people reveals what you really think and believe about Him.

Your response to His people shows your response to Him, for He is *that* closely linked with His people. *[pauseeee]*

Aren't we called "the *body* of Christ"?¹⁰ *[pause]*

You treat His body badly, you are treating Him badly. *[pauseeee]*

Isn't that so amazing how Jesus views us as His people?

⁸ Acts 9:5.

⁹ John 15:20.

¹⁰ A reference to 1 Corinthians 12:27.

He links Himself so closely to us, and cares for us so much that He holds people accountable for how they treat us, as if they were doing it to Him. *[pauseeee]*

This text shows us an important truth, and it's that...

Judgment will be based on your response to Jesus, which is revealed in your treatment of His people.

Jesus is the King and the Judge, and He *is* coming again in glory.

He will take His seat on His throne, and it will be time for judgment. *[pause]*

There are only two options: to be called blessed or cursed.

That is, to inherit the kingdom or to experience eternal punishment.

And Jesus' judgment will ultimately be based on your relationship to Him, which is revealed in how you treated His people. *[pauseee]*

We don't treat Christians well in order to gain a standing with God, but we treat Christians well because we can't help it, for we have been radically changed by God's grace.

For Jesus came to this earth, though we were rebellious sinners, and shed His blood for us, so that we could be forgiven and have eternal life.

And only through simple faith in Him are we saved, called blessed, and get to inherit the kingdom. *[pauseeee]*

Those who have simply repented of their sins, and experienced the saving grace of Jesus love and cherish Jesus' brothers and sisters. *[pause]*

The root of love for Jesus will lead to the fruit of love for His family members.

And those who hate or are indifferent to Jesus will show that in their hate or indifference to His people. *[pauseeee]*

1 John 3:17 makes this clear when it says...

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" *[pauseeee]*

Do you disregard needy believers? Or do you actually help them in some way? *[pause]*

Your response to that question reveals your response to Jesus because your treatment of His people reveals your relationship with Him, which has eternal consequences. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you're here today and you think about your response to the least of Christ's disciples, and you think, "I haven't actually responded well to needy believers at all." *[pause]*

Examine your heart—have you truly trusted in Jesus alone?

Is your faith dead, like James points out?¹¹ *[pause]*

Turn to Jesus and be saved, and let His amazing grace transform your heart, which will lead to love for needy Christians. *[pauseeee]*

Or maybe you're here today and you think, "Yeah, I've put my faith in Jesus alone for my salvation, and I see the fruit in how I treat His people, but it's not perfect, and I need to excel even more at it." *[pause]*

Join the club! *[pause]*

Let's use a passage like this to help us to excel even more at caring for Christians, knowing that we are caring for Christ in doing so. *[pauseeee]*

I think we do well as a church at giving money when the call goes out for someone in need, and in providing meals when we invite you to, but could we excel even more? *[pause]*

What if you took initiative to think of how *you personally* could provide for a need?

What if you took initiative to come up with creative ideas that we all as a church could do for someone? *[pauseeee]*

Think of the early church in Acts.

People loved one another so much that they were willing to literally sell their possessions, belongings, homes, and properties to provide for needy believers.

And what was the amazing result?

"There was not a needy person among them."¹² *[pause]*

Would you be willing to sacrifice like that to show care and love for needy believers among us? *[pause]*

Let's each look around us, and see what needs we could provide for.

And let's ask the Spirit to grow us in this area, for we may indeed be loving one another, but may we "do this more and more."¹³

¹¹ James 2:15–17.

¹² Acts 4:34 (see also Acts 2:45).

¹³ 1 Thessalonians 4:10.