

“Receive your Inheritance: The Sheep and Goats” by Pastor Steve Sommerer  
Last Sunday of the Church Year Nov. 22, 2020

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

The sermon text is from Matthew chapter 25:31-46 previously read.

On Judgment Day, the judgment has already happened in a certain sense. The sheep are on the right; the goats, the left. You’re either one or the other from the moment you come to faith. The sheep are God’s believers. Jesus the Good Shepherd said, “*My sheep hear My voice. I know them and they follow Me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.*” Jesus said about His sheep: “*I am the Door of the sheep... whoever enters by Me will be saved.*” The goats are also judged before that final, public reckoning on Judgment Day. Jesus said, “*Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*”

So the faith by which you are saved is hidden. I can’t see if you believe. No one but God knows perfectly who really trusts in Christ as the Savior. On Judgment Day there is a public, final recognition of your status – were you a sheep or a goat, a believer or unbeliever? And the evidence of your status will be the good works that God the Holy Spirit worked through you in your life. “*By their fruits you will know,*” Jesus said.

First, notice there are only two camps, saved or damned, heaven or hell. There’s no purgatory line 3 for the undecided voter. But note also: God doesn’t desire, nor did He ever intend that hell should be for people. Our text says hell was “*prepared for the devil and his evil angels.*” Those who go to hell are lost eternally through unbelief having rejected Christ. Jesus said, “*How I longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings – but you were not willing!*” Dear ones, let this be a reminder that you and I should always share the Gospel of Jesus and pray for God to destroy the devil’s will and work and let His Kingdom come.

Now, listen to Jesus’ word to His sheep: “*The King will say to those on His right, ‘Come you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’*” He calls them blessed. Your good works are evidence of a living faith, but they do not save you. Blessed is a word in Scripture that emphasizes receiving a free gift from God. The inheritance wasn’t owed them for feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, or clothing the naked. If they had earned salvation, it would have been a wage earned and owed. But He calls them “*blessed.*”

Wonderful too: Not a word is said about the sins of the sheep. You are a sinner. “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*” Romans says. But on Judgment Day for the believer, the sheep, they are no more, Jesus carried them and washed them away in His blood. Psalm 32 says: “*Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against Him.*” In Jeremiah, God promises, “*I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.*” For the sheep who followed the Good Shepherd on Judgment Day the sins have been banished as far as the east from the west.

The King also says to His sheep, “*Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared before the creation of the world.*” Eternal life with the Lord is an inheritance. But how

do we receive an inheritance? The one who receives it must be an heir a member of the family. Apart from Christ, you aren't part of God's family. He took real, human flesh in Mary's womb so that He could be your true Brother, one with you in every way except without sin. Galatians 4 says, "*God sent forth His Son born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law; that we might receive the adoption of sons.*" That's how you are an heir with an inheritance. You were adopted in Jesus through faith. Romans says, "*The Holy Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children, and if we are children we are heirs.*"

The King continues: "*For I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me to drink, in prison and you came to visit me.*" "*Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you?'*" The sheep at Jesus' right hand are honestly humble. They have no realization of doing anything worthy of God's kingdom. Their trust was totally in the death and resurrection of Jesus. They take no credit for themselves, only clinging to the cross. These our text calls "*righteous.*"

These verses are so important for us. Here we see that not only is our forgiveness or our justification by God's grace alone, but so is our sanctification – our life of good works. Philippians 2 says, "*God works in you to will and to act.*" Don't ever listen to the devil's lie that because Jesus saves you through faith you can live in unrepentant sin. Not so! That's a lie straight from hell, from the devil: people start to think since Jesus died for me I can be a Christian and hate church or live in sexual sin or work every Sunday and live for the false god of Money.

God wants you to do good works, and if you don't care about that: don't fool yourself that you're still a Christian. Repent! Why should you be damned? Turn from your wicked ways and live.

To be a sheep is God's saving gift and work. Righteousness or justification is God's grace, His undeserved love. Jesus took all that is ugly and hateful, all that is sinful and damning, He took all your sin, and, though He was perfect, died for your sins. Through faith in Christ, God declares you to be what you aren't in and of yourselves. Christ took the filthy rags of your unrighteousness to the cross. Through faith He clothes you in His righteousness and forgiveness.

Good works play no part in your salvation. Heaven isn't 99.9% a gift from God and 1/10% what you do. It is totally God's gift. Clothing the needy, feeding the hungry, whatever the good deeds. Never hope in your actions. Hope in God's promises through Christ. Even good works are God's work in you. Galatians says, "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc.*"

The faith through which you were saved and covered in Jesus is already known to God. It will be publicly recognized on Judgment Day by your works. Like a spring bubbles up and the stream of water flows many miles downstream. The faith-filled heart bubbles up and the stream of works flow – but it's not the stream that makes the spring, rather the living, flowing spring produces a stream. God doesn't need your good works. Don't aim them into heaven as though you're buying God off. Leave your good works down here. God doesn't need them. Let God's love bubble up in you and flow to your neighbor.

The Holy Spirit enables you and works through you to feed the hungry, to reach out with God's love for the poor. The Holy Spirit empowers you to serve God in the place He puts you in life, but never trust in your works! And when you get selfish and

lazy, cry out: “Dear God, forgive me!” And get back to work. Don’t waste your life. Use the gifts God gives you. God made you you, for a reason – use your gifts to live for Him. Pray God give you eyes to see the opportunities and courage to act and strength to persist. Live each moment of your life knowing that you are saved by God’s grace, but spend your energies in doing good as though it all depends on you!

Think about the places God puts you. That’s where God has you to serve Him by serving your neighbor. God feeds the hungry through the hands of the farmer, the grocer, and the momma over the stove. God clothes the naked through moms and dads with their babies, the Rescue Mission with our Galesburg needy families. God uses bosses and jobs to feed the hungry. This is God’s world and He has woven the connections in your life in such a way that He wants you to bear fruit to His glory. If you aren’t; if your life is a lazy, useless dodge of serving yourself; you better wake up. When that spring of faith that is the Holy Spirit bubbles up... it won’t go underground.

For those goats, those damned because they rejected Christ, their lack of good works – the dry stream bed of their lives – is evidence the spring was stopped up, choked out by unbelief. When you turn on a light, it casts its rays in every direction. Jesus said, *“Let your light so shine before men that they see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”* These hear the chilling word, *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”*

A normal Graduation Day is a public celebration of the grades and homework and classes that a student did over the course of years. The public bestowal of the diploma is a public recognition of a judgment made earlier. When the graduate walks the stage and the tassel is flipped, the family and friends celebrate something already achieved. When God publicly celebrates the works the Holy Spirit did through His sheep on Judgment Day, He simply recognizes a reality that has been true since the Sheep heard the Shepherd’s voice and entered through the door of faith.

May you and I always rejoice that God makes us His sheep – not because of how good we are, but how gracious and loving He is. But as His sheep, blessed beyond imagination, serve Him. Make your life worthy. Young people. Don’t just aim to make a career and money. Ask God to help you to make a difference and be a blessing to your neighbor. Young or old, let your life bring glory to the God who loves you so completely in Jesus. *“Shine as lights in this world, holding fast to the word of life.”*

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.