

## Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> “Then 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. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

<sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

<sup>41</sup> “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. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

<sup>44</sup> “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

<sup>45</sup> “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

<sup>46</sup> “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

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Have you ever seen a defendant in a courtroom before the verdict is read? As the judge asks them to rise, you can see the weight of the moment bearing down on them. You can see the unsteady legs and hear the unsteady voice. As you look into their eyes you can see fear. And this is even with the people that have not committed a crime, or that have had an excellent defense put together. Now imagine the person who is obviously guilty. They are guilty and the judge knows it, everyone in the courtroom knows it too. Even his attorney struggled to make a good defense, because his guilt was so obvious. When that person stand to hear the judge, you can literally see the fear.

It’s a scary thing to have your future put in the hands of a judge. Your future could be dependent on the judge’s mood that day. It could be decided on his biased worldview. It could be swayed by false evidence or a persuasive prosecutor. It’s no wonder that a courtroom is a place that invokes fear.

The Day of Judgment for this world is fast approaching. Each and every person in this world will have their day in court. Each and every person will have their own personal Judgment Day. And that causes many to fear. It causes fear in so many hearts that many pretend as if this fact is not true. Or perhaps a more prevalent way to cope with this truth is to artificially lower the judge’s standards. If you listen to the news casts when a person dies unexpectedly you’ll hear it. So and so is in heaven – no mention of Jesus, not because of faith in a Savior – but because they died unexpectedly. Just because a person dies young, doesn’t mean that they will be saved. I hear it often when soldiers are killed in combat or in training missions. Service to our country is a noble profession, but it doesn’t forgive sins, it certainly doesn’t equal a free ticket to heaven. All people will have their date with the judge.

And that includes you and it includes me. We too will face the Judge, but we don't need to fear Judgment Day like the rest of the world. We don't need to be afraid of the End of the World, or be afraid of Judgment Day or be afraid of death, because the Judge has issued us his verdict. He tells us in the words before us today that he will separate the sheep from the goats on Judgment Day, and that he will take the sheep to be with him forever. Through faith, we know that we will be among the sheep, therefore, we can **Approach Judgment Day Sheepishly**. Sheep in the flock of the Good Shepherd have nothing to fear. For us who have been saved by grace through faith, being sheepish is a good thing. We can act like sheep, Christian sheep, in this world knowing that 1) God has made us to be sheep, and because he has done that - we can rejoice in knowing that he will 2) enable us to live a sheepish lives.

1) God has made us to be sheep

Seeing a judge is usually an intimidating thing. They wear the long black robe. They have a gavel that can silence the courtroom, and maybe the most intimidating weapon at his disposal, the bailiff - a personal armed assistant, whose only job it is to carry out the judge's demands. At the simple request of the judge you could be thrown out of the courtroom, arrested, thrown in jail. There is a lot of power at the judge's seat and that power makes us a little uncomfortable.

If a normal judge intimidates you, then the judge that you met in our first lesson is even worse.

*“thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat.*

*His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool.*

*His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.*

<sup>10</sup> *A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him.*

*Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.*

*The court was seated, and the books were opened.*

Yikes!! That's not the kind of judge that I want to see presiding at my traffic court case!! But that's my judge. The Ancient of Days, the God of the Universe, is presiding over the case of my life. And it gets worse, because I know what is in that book that he has opened before him – it's a record of everything that I have done wrong. Paul tells us in our second lesson for today what is in that book. He says: <sup>5</sup> ***But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.*** <sup>6</sup> God ***“will give to each person according to what he has done.”*** There before us God reads the book of what ***each person has done.*** And the chapter with my name on it seems to go on forever. Every grotesque thought, every hateful word, every scheme to get even. And it's a list of the things that I haven't done, too. Every time I refused to listen to a friend in need. Every time I was too busy for worship or devotion, every time I didn't use my gifts to serve him, every time I looked away from a brother in need. As if I needed a reminder of the guilty life that I have lived, now I stand in court to face judgment and the punishment that I deserve. I stand before the Ancient of Days, a criminal without excuse.

And then a whirlwind of activity, almost faster than I can keep up with. The Judge slams his gavel and makes his decree. “Did I hear him right? Did he say ‘Not guilty!!’” He most certainly did!! God tells us that our punishment has been taken on by someone else. He tells us that our debt has been paid by Jesus. Jesus satisfied the Judge's demand when he lived the perfect life. Jesus was judged by the same standard as we are, but with a very different outcome. When the Judge reads the chapter with

Jesus and judge's him *according to what he has done* the outcome is far different. We have a partial record of that book in our Bible, but God has the record of everything that Jesus ever did, every thought and every action. And that book catalogs his perfection. He always loved with his whole heart, he always delighted in serving rather than being served. He always showed compassion, even to those who were vastly different than he. He lived a truly perfect life, yet never boasted even in that. He willingly set that accomplishment aside to become the most sinful person that has ever lived. He took the sins of the world onto his account, and faced the Judge to receive his punishment. He suffered for our sins and died our death, being crucified on Calvary's cross. He lived so that we could be forgiven, and he died a violent death so that we could have a life a peace. He died a death that he didn't deserve, so that we could hear a verdict we didn't deserve. He died so that we could hear our judge say "Not guilty!" He died so that we could hear our Jesus say, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*"

God the Father will separate the sheep from the goats on Judgment Day. Though many might approach this day with uncertainty and with fear, we can approach it with confidence and hope. We can **Approach Judgment Day Sheepishly**, because we know that God has made us to be a sheep. He has already declared us to be forgiven. As a sheep in God's flock, we can strive to live sheepish lives of boldness and confidence to his glory. And knowing that God has made us to be sheep, gives us a different outlook and approach to life. As we live here in the End Times, we can live sheepish lives, knowing that God has equipped us to do just that.

2) God has enabled us to live sheepish lives

Last week we explored freedom and we took note that the person who has been set free, can't help but appreciate their newfound freedom. They will live in that freedom and celebrate it for the rest of their lives. The same is true of those who have been declared not guilty. It changes our lives. We have been called sheep by our heavenly Father and now we will find great joy in living sheepish lives to thank him for his forgiveness and love.

The sheepish lives that we can live are the evidences of the saving faith that God has put in our lives. A man more clever than me once said, "We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone." Last week on Reformation Day, we nailed home the point that we are saved by grace and not by works. Today we put works in their place, as a natural result of saving faith. They are the indicator that we are the sheep that God has made us to be. We are saved by Jesus' works alone, but we can offer Sheepish lives to thank and praise him. Our sheepish lives are the outward way that people can see the sheepish hearts that God has put inside of us by grace.

God sets some good examples of sheepish living before us in these words. *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,* <sup>36</sup> *I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* Even though we have never seen Jesus in these predicaments, we have seen others in them. Jesus says, *whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'* But be cautious against making this an exhaustive list. We don't want to read these words and say, "If I've never done prison ministry, or never donated to a clothing drive, or never volunteered in a hospital, then I have not been living a worthy life." Jesus is saying that as we help others, we are really helping him. As we faithfully carry out our vocations to our neighbors, we are

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being faithful to him. When we live sheepish lives, we are offering sheepish, worthy worship to our loving Lord. When a Father puts food on the table for his family, he is doing it for the Lord. When a mother holds her daughter's hair so that she can throw up when she is sick, it's like offering that selfless service to God himself. When we go out of our way to help a person in need, we are going out of our way to help our God. Those actions which could only be done for selfish reasons, now we can do for sheepish reasons – as a way to thank our loving Lord.

So many around us are going to be the world's kind of sheepish when it comes to thinking about Judgment Day. And without Jesus, there is every reason to be afraid. But we can be God's kind of sheepish. We can have a Christian sheep's attitude of confidence and joy, as we await our judgment. We know that heaven is our eternal home and that we have already been judged worthy through Jesus. We can live our lives to God's glory and **Approach Judgement Day Sheepishly**, and it's all thanks to Jesus, our Savior and Friend. Amen.