

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31-46)

Context: The book of Matthew emphasizes that God has drawn near to Israel (and the world), in the person of Jesus his son, to inaugurate his long-awaited kingdom (1:1; 2:5-6; 3:1-3; 4:12-17; 12:15-21; 21:1-5). Consequently, much of Jesus' teaching is about what persons will have a place in God's kingdom (5:1-7:29; 13:1-52; 25:31-46). Surprisingly it is not the religious leaders in Israel (like the Pharisees or Sadducees) who have a guaranteed place in the kingdom (5:20), nor even the ethnic Jew (3:7-10; 8:5-13), but the person who repents and follows Jesus (4:17-22; 9:9; 12:46-50; 16:24-28; 28:18-20) – even if that person is a non-Jew (15:21-28) or a "sinner" (9:13). Jesus also teaches that those who will inherit the kingdom are more than just externally religious (5:20; 6:1-16; 15:20; 23:1-36), but those who have a heart for compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and justice (9:10-13; 12:1-8; 14:14; 15:32; 18:21-35; 20:34; 23:23; 25:31-46). The parable of the Sheep and the Goats fits well within these broader themes.

Text: [31] "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. [34] 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.' [41] 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."

Observations:

- Jesus originally spoken these words to the disciples, those who were already following him (v. 24:1). Thus, believers need to hear these words just as much as unbelievers.
- The passage is about final judgment for all the nations concerning what persons will inherit the kingdom and what persons will go away into eternal punishment (vv. 31-32, 34, 46). Thus, these words ought to be taken very seriously.
- The determining factor in this judgment is how one treated the "least of these."
- The "least of these" are described as the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner – those who are without and in need, those who are often marginalized by society (vv. 35-40, 42-45).
- Jesus also calls the "least of these" his brothers (v. 40), as he identifies with the marginalized.
- To minister to the "least of these" is to minister to Jesus directly (v. 40); to disregard the "least of these" is to disregard Jesus (v. 45).

Main point(s):

- Those who minister to the "least of these" simultaneously minister to Jesus himself and will inherit the

kingdom.

- Those who disregard the “least of these” simultaneously disregard Jesus and will go away into eternal punishment.

Application to the abortion issue:

- If the “least of these” are those needing help, those who are without and in need, the marginalized, then children growing in the womb and women (especially woman who are pregnant and scared) should be included among them.
- Developing children in the womb are literally the “least among us,” as they are the smallest and most dependent.
- If ministering to Jesus means ministering to those whose livelihood is threatened, then we can minister to Jesus himself by helping abortion-vulnerable children and their mothers.
- Since, according to Jesus inheriting the kingdom depends on how we treat the “least of these,” we should be sobered if we are failing to do so. If we can see people who are helpless, hurting, mistreated, or slaughtered and not care, we cannot be in God’s will.