

The King's Priorities

Matthew 25:31-46

Verse 34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;...'"

Sunday, November 22, 2020 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction: Once, some years ago, Jeanne and I took a trip that involved driving our car into the hold of a ferryboat. The crew gave us two choices, one was to let them drive the car into the ship, the other was to drive it ourselves under their direction. The challenge was that you had to back your car into the ship, avoiding other vehicles and support poles, all while watching the crewman who was walking behind you, giving you hand signals. It wasn't intuitive, but that was what you had to do. I think this situation shares that characteristic with our passage for today. Where we are inclined to look is not where we are supposed to look. In my car I was inclined to look over my shoulder to watch where I was driving, but that would have been wrong. In this passage we are inclined to look at "sheep" and "goats" but I think the true focus of the passage, the key verse, is the one about a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.

Set the stage

Jesus, toward the end of His life on earth, teaches His disciples with the famous parable about the "Sheep and the Goats" He depicts a great scene of judgment when He returns and holds the nations to account for their deeds, and people are divided into two camps, "goats" on one side and "sheep" on another. The "goats" were condemned for their failures and the "sheep" commended for serving Christ in all manner of distress and difficulty. When asked at what time did they serve Him in this way, Jesus replied that when they served the "least of these, my brethren, they served Me". While that is an appropriate application and injunction to help the suffering whenever possible, I think the true focus is verse 34.

Main Point: We give to the poor, but our eyes are on Christ.

Our eyes are to be on the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, not on the danger of being a "goat". While it is good to reflect how we treat the poor, they should not be our focus, but rather the wonderful grace of God, who has provided us with everything we need and has repeatedly informed us that He has a destiny for us, the preparation of which has continued from the beginning of Creation. In Ephesians, Paul strikes the same theme:

Ephesians 1:3-6 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."

Application

Destiny motivates present obedience. It's not about awards, or rewards or avoiding punishment. It's about Christ. Don't expect thanks from the poor (you might receive thanks, but that is not your concern). Generosity is easier when we understand the generosity of Christ to us.

Conclusion

It is natural to read this famous parable and think, "whatever happens, I don't want to be one of the goats". Absolutely, but I think we miss the point if our focus on the good works necessary to be one of the sheep. For a sheep, acting like a sheep should come naturally and mercy should come naturally for a Christian. The King's priority is the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, and that should be our focus as well.